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"YES," CECILE ANSWERED, "I LOVE RONALD GALBRAITH STILL, AND SHALL GO ON LOVING HIM AS LONG AS I LIVE."

THE MYSTERY OF THE TOWER

CHAPTER VII.

(CONCLUDED.)

ALINE was seated on a couch, her head buried in her hands, while on the floor lay her mask and the bouquet of flowers she had carried, and which she had thrown carelessly down in the excitement of her entrance.

Before she was even aware of his presence, Bertie was at her feet, his own mask torn off, and his eyes full of piteous entreaty.

"Aline—Aline—forgive me! I know how

deeply I have sinned, but surely my remorse may atone!"

She sprang up hastily at the sound of his voice, and dashed away her tears. In her haste in taking off her mask the fastenings of her hair had come down, and now the long abundant waves lay over her shoulders in a heavy, dusky veil far below her waist.

Her surprise at seeing him was so great that for a moment she was silent. Then she said in a low voice:

"I will take your remorse for granted, Captain Charlton; but you have no business here. Leave me at once."

"No," he returned, with a certain dogged resolution. "I will not leave until I have heard you say, with your own lips, that I am pardoned. I had written a letter to you—here it is"—as he gave it to her—"and I in-

tended pushing it under your door, but the sound of your sobs made it impossible for me to go until I had seen you, and gained your forgiveness. Aline, I know you are very angry with me—"

"And with due cause," she interrupted, sternly.

"Yes, I know that as well, but there are some moments in a man's life when reason deserts him—and that was one! I do not excuse myself—excuse is impossible—but I beg you not to judge me too harshly. This is, perhaps, the last time we may meet on this side of the grave, and I cannot part from you in anger. Tell me you will forget that this night has ever been—that you will remember me only as the friend of three years ago—the friend whom you used to like!"

Aline was silent. She half turned away

from him, so that the falling cloud of her hair hid her face, but he could see she was trembling; and, emboldened by the sight of her agitation, he continued to urge his repentance.

"I am going away to-morrow, I and my wife, and I shall never, of my own free will, come back to Galbraith Castle while you are here. Only—Aline"—he hesitated, as if he hardly dared give utterance to the words he wished to say—"only, before I go, I should like to hear you promise, not only that you will pardon me, but that if, in the future, I can ever do anything for you, you will let me know. I am aware I have forfeited my right to ask it, and yet—believe me, Heaven helping me—I will prove a true and faithful friend to you!"

Aline was beginning to feel the result of the strain she had endured during the past week—ever since she came to the Castle, in fact—and which had been brought to a crisis by the events of the evening. The reaction suddenly came upon her. She felt breathless—suffocated—as if she were going to faint.

"Open the window!" she exclaimed, huskily. "I must have air—I cannot breathe."

Alarmed by her white face, Charlton sprang up and did her bidding; then throwing his arm round her waist to support her, he led her to the window through which the cold night air was blowing—chill and icy across the snow-covered plain.

In his anxiety, it did not occur to the young officer how dangerous that keen wind must be, striking as it did, on her uncovered neck and arms—for it must be remembered that she was still in the Italian peasant's costume she had worn at the masquerade.

For quite ten minutes she remained motionless, leaning against the stonework of the window, her breath coming in gasps; then, with a faint smile, she drew back into the room.

"I am better now. Thank you for your assistance. Please leave me."

"Shall I send someone to you—or get you some brandy?" he asked, anxiously; but she shook her head with some impatience.

"No—go! I would rather be left to myself. I assure you I am quite all right. It was merely a temporary faintness—that is all. Pray go away at once."

Without more ado he obeyed, but as he closed her door he heard footsteps coming towards him along the passage; and for the first time it occurred to him that his presence in the governess's apartments was, if discovered, likely to give rise to very unpleasant comments. He cursed his own thoughtlessness for not having thought of this before, but he had entered the sitting-room on the spur of the moment, and without giving himself time to calculate after consequences.

There was a small door on his left—one that Ronald Galbraith frequently used—and through this Charlton determined to make his exit.

Luckily for him it was not even bolted, so it was the work of a moment to unfasten it and slip outside into the moonlight before Galbraith—for it was he who was proceeding to his own rooms in the Tower—had seen him.

Once in the keen, fresh air, he felt no inclination to return to the house again where it was impossible to get away from the sounds of festivity which so ill-accommoded with his own frame of mind.

Opposite him was the plantation, and the path through it had been swept free from snow. He decided to go as far as the park in the hope that the walk would help him to regain some degree of calmness.

He shivered with a strange, half-superstitious fear as he walked down between the rows of solemn pines. Something brushed past his face, uttering at the same moment a

loud, unearthly screech, that had the effect of bringing him to a standstill.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered to himself. "It was only an owl. My nerves must be out of order for it to startle me like this."

And assuredly he was startled, for there was something unearthly in that sudden, weird hooting; and perhaps his nerves were, as he said, out of order, and made him more liable than usual to such impressions.

He had discovered that his long black domino was not by any means a comfortable garment for walking in. Its folds blew about in the night wind and caught in the low undergrowth of brambles which bordered the path on either side. In disengaging it he pulled at it with some impatience and tore his hand with a thorn, inflicting rather a deep scratch, which bled a good deal.

He took out a handkerchief and stanchoned the blood, and then he became aware of the sound of voices, all raised as if in excitement, and a few seconds later two men came hastily down the path towards him.

They were Ronald Galbraith and Mr. Proctor—the barrister of whom previous mention has been made.

"Ah, Charlton!" exclaimed the latter. "We have been looking for you all over the place."

"Looking for me!" Bertie repeated, rather confusedly. "What do you want me for?"

Before answering, the barrister drew his arm through that of Charlton, and began walking back towards the Castle, followed by Galbraith, whose face, as the moonlight fell upon it, looked curiously white and frightened.

"The fact is, something has happened at the Castle," said Mr. Proctor. "Something in which you are more interested than anyone else."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bertie, alarmed by his voice. "What do you mean?"

"This. A murder has been committed."

"A murder!" in a voice of horror. "At the Castle?"

"Yes, at the Castle." Mr. Proctor paused a moment, then, looking rather fixedly at the young man, he added, "you do not ask who the victim is?"

"I—dare not!" Bertie murmured, more to himself than to his auditors.

Mr. Proctor's words had recurred to him—"you are more interested than anyone else"—and his thoughts had immediately flown to Aline.

"You dare not!" Mr. Proctor repeated, in accents of strongly marked surprise. "That is a curious thing to say. The poor murdered woman is your wife."

"My wife!"

Bertie could only stand and look at the barrister in absolute stupefaction.

"You do not mean it—it cannot be true!" he exclaimed, at last.

"It is true—true as that you and I are standing here," Mr. Proctor returned, stolidly. "She is upstairs in her sitting-room—quite dead."

"But who—how did it happen?" Bertie asked, hardly yet realising the awful calamity.

"Ah! that we do not yet know," the barrister answered, with a queer intonation. "She has been stabbed to the heart—that is all that I can tell you; but whoever the murderer is, you may be quite sure we shall never rest until we have brought him to justice."

Too stupefied to ask any more questions, Bertie contended himself with walking quickly towards the Castle, where an untimely end had been put to the gaieties of the ball.

Everything was in confusion; the band had gone away, so had several of the guests, and the terrace was thronged with carriages waiting to convey the rest from the scene of the crime.

Men were gathered together in knots in the

hall discussing the awful event—for the news had spread like wildfire—and women, with pale, seared faces, implored wildly to be taken home.

The servants went about in a frightened sort of way, showing, from their very demeanour, that something awful had happened.

Everyone fell back as Bertie approached. They seemed either to recognise his right to a clear pathway, or to evince a general wish to avoid him.

"Ah!" screamed one lady. "He has blood upon his hand now!"

This was true. Bertie had forgotten his scratch, and the blood had trickled forth unnoticed. He hastily hid his hand in the folds of his domino and then, without further interruption, went upstairs, still accompanied by Ronald and Mr. Proctor—indeed, the latter never for a moment, relinquished his hold on the young officer's arm.

Outside the sitting-room door stood Lady Galbraith, Sydney Borlase, and one or two other people. The Countess came forward, and put her hand on Charlton's arm.

"This is an awful thing for you, Bertie," she whispered, "you have my deepest sympathy."

He thanked her mechanically, then someone opened the door, and he found himself in the chamber of death.

The candles were lighted, the fire was burning. Everything seemed just as he had left it not an hour ago, and yet over all a change had fallen, for one thing was there which, by its hideous presence, altered all the rest. On the couch lay, at full length, the figure of Adeline Charlton, still in the rich silks and laces of her Spanish dress. Her head was thrown back on the cushions, and even yet the features had not lost the horrible traces of the death struggle. One hand was firmly clenched, the other hung inert at her side, and the faces of her corse were all dabbled in a deep red flood, where, just above the heart, the cruel knife had been driven through.

As he looked at her, all remembrance of her faults and follies left Bertie's mind. He only thought of her as his wife—the woman whose life had been thus treacherously reft from her. Approaching the couch he knelt at its side, and reverently kissed her hand, afterwards placing it gently on her breast. Its marble coldness struck a chill through his veins—it told him better than anything else that she was, indeed, past human aid.

"The Countess has already sent for a doctor," said Ronald Galbraith, in a low, hushed voice, "but I am afraid he will be able to render us no assistance. Poor Mrs. Charlton is beyond his skill."

"Bertie," said Sydney Borlase, coming forward for the first time, "you have blood upon your hand—do you know it?"

This was the second time Bertie's attention had been called to the fact, for again, he had, as was quite natural, entirely forgotten his wounded hand.

"It is nothing," he said, hastily, "only a scratch."

"How did you get it?" persisted Sydney, who was looking at him very intently.

"I don't know—I cannot tell you at this moment. Why," he asked, his voice unconsciously taking an inflection of anger, "do you worry me with such trivialities when I have so terrible a responsibility upon me?"

"It is not a triviality—or, at least, it may not turn out to be," Borlase answered, so significantly that Charlton found himself wondering what he meant.

No suspicion of his true meaning flashed upon him. He was, indeed, so entirely absorbed by the horror and mystery of his wife's death that he had no thought for anything else. Even the recollection of Aline faded from his mind in this terrible moment.

"I suppose," said Mr. Proctor, "you can throw no light on this mystery?"

"If No. How is it possible that I should be able to do so!"

"When was the last time you saw your wife?"

"In the ball-room—I danced a set of lancers with her."

"What time was that?"

Bertie considered.

"I think it must have been somewhere about eleven."

"And have you been in the ball-room since then?"

He hesitated. Every eye was upon him. He felt rather than saw that his answers were being listened to with the deepest attention.

"Yes. I danced the next dance—a valse."

"And after that?"

There was something in the tone of the question that Charlie resented—an indefinable air of cross-examination.

"Why do you question me so closely?" he asked. "What have my movements to do with this crime?"

"We simply want to gather all the information we can, by way of dissipating the mystery," the barrister answered, cautiously. "It seems to me the most natural thing in the world that we should have a full account of your movements during the evening. Do you mean to tell us that the last time you saw your wife alive was when you danced the lancers with her?"

"Yes. That is so."

"And where have you been since the valse which came directly after?"

Bertie thought of Aline. To confess the truth meant dragging her name into this miserable business, and that he was most reluctant to do. If it became known that he had spent some time in her room—alone with her—far away from the other inmates of the Castle, her fair name was ruined for ever.

He groaned as he thought of his own imprudence, and at the same moment resolved that wild horses should not wring from him the confession.

He had injured her quite enough already, without bringing the shadow of an undying disgrace on her name.

As he looked around, his eyes fell on that white, still face, and he turned on his questioner almost fiercely.

"I will tell you nothing in this room, which is desecrated by your presence. Have you no more respect for my sorrow than to torture me with these details?"

"Captain Charlton is right," said Ronald Galbraith. "Our presence here any longer is an intrusion. The chamber of death should be sacred."

CHAPTER VIII.

There was not much rest for the inmates of the Castle that night—the excitement was too great for anyone to think of going to bed; and it was augmented by the appearance of two policemen on the scene, who made a strict examination of the outside of the Castle, and tried to trace the various footmarks in the snow, in the hope of finding some clue to the mystery of the murder.

Before, however, they had got half-way through their task it began to snow heavily, and the thick white flakes soon obliterated all traces of footprints, and forced the policemen to relinquish their work as hopeless.

One person alone was not affected by the general disquietude, and that person was so insignificant that she had been quite forgotten—even by the Countess. She, it is needless to say, was Aline Somers, who, after Charlton had left her, remained near the open window in a sort of lethargy, the cold air still blowing in upon her bare throat and arms.

At last she got up, and threw herself on the couch, without even troubling to close the window. Indeed, it seemed to her as if the fresh air were a necessity which she could not do without, and the thought that it might do her harm was the last that occurred to her. Her mind was in a chaos.

Love for Bertie struggled with a sense of duty which told her she ought to overcome it. She did try, poor child! strove as hard as she knew how, and the struggle was proving too much for her.

When the grey twilight of the winter dawn brought with it the maid whose duty it was to light the fire in the sitting-room, she found the young governess still lying dressed on the couch, and the snow still blowing in through the open window.

The young girl's face was flushed, her eyes were wild and bright, and her hair was falling in tangled luxuriance over the cushions.

She was talking to herself, and took no notice when the servant spoke to her.

The latter was frightened at her appearance and went immediately to call the housekeeper, who chanced to have some skill as a nurse.

One glance into the sweet, flushed face, one touch of the hot, throbbing forehead and burning hand, was sufficient to tell her the truth. Aline was in the delirium of fever.

A doctor happened to be in the Castle at the time—the one who had been sent for to see Mrs. Charlton—and he was brought into the governess's apartments.

He said at once she was suffering from brain fever, and declared that the greatest skill and attention were necessary to save her life.

Thereupon the Countess, half distracted with all the woes accumulating upon her, telegraphed off to London for a hospital nurse, and a few hours later one was installed at the poor girl's bedside—where she was destined to keep her vigil for many a long day and weary night.

Meanwhile, on the morning following the murder, it was decided that an inquest should be held on poor Adeline Charlton's body.

During the night Bertie had paced miserably to and fro in his bedroom, half distracted by the horror of the situation, and racking his brain to discover the wretched assassin whose hand had taken a helpless woman's life.

By Ronald Galbraith's express command he was left alone, otherwise Mr. Proctor and others would have been pestering him with questions which he would have found it both difficult and painful to answer.

As soon as the coroner arrived Charlton was requested to go downstairs to the library, whither the murdered woman's body had already been taken, and, on coming out of his rooms he noticed a policeman stationed on the landing, but his brain was too hazy to suggest the reason of his presence.

In the library all the Countess's male guests were assembled, as well as the coroner and the jury, and proceedings commenced by the evidence of Dr. Copeland—the physician who had been sent for after the discovery of the crime.

He said little enough, simply stating that Mrs. Charlton's death had been caused by a blow from a knife or dagger, which had penetrated to the heart. Such a blow could not have been self-inflicted—could only, indeed, have been dealt by the hand of a strong man, and must have caused instantaneous death. Probably the deceased lady did not even groan, and that would account for no screams being heard.

The next witness called was Selina Hill—Mrs. Charlton's maid—who had been the first to discover the murder, and she testified to having heard voices in her mistress's sitting-room a little before twelve o'clock. One she recognised as that of her mistress, the other was lower and deeper—evidently a man's voice—and she supposed it to be that of Captain Charlton, but she could not swear to it for certain.

Asked whether she heard what was said, she replied in the negative. She was in the bedroom adjoining—had come upstairs to attend to the fire, and did not stay more than ten minutes; but—here she hesitated, and on being pressed to continue, added that she fancied some sort of a quarrel was going on, judging from the sound of Mrs. Charlton's voice.

The coroner then asked if Captain and Mrs. Charlton lived on good terms with each other,

and the witness reluctantly admitted they did not, and then glanced across at Bertie, and began to cry.

Seeing her distress, he said:—

"Speak the truth, Hill. You need not be afraid of wounding my feelings, or making me angry."

The coroner looked rather annoyed at the interruption, and sharply told Captain Charlton to be silent.

Then he turned to the witness again, and questioned her at some length, trying to elicit particulars of the terms on which Mrs. Charlton really had been with her husband.

The maid confessed to having overheard several disputes between them, but it was generally Mrs. Charlton who quarrelled; her husband, as a rule, held his tongue.

Further pressed, Selina Hill said she had heard her mistress tell the Captain that he had married her for her money, and that if he could have that without her he would be pleased.

So far as she could see the Captain had always treated his wife with the greatest kindness and consideration—more than she should have done if she had been in his place!

Asked as to the position of the suite of rooms occupied by the Charltons she explained that they consisted of four. A sitting-room with a bedroom beyond. On the right and left of the sitting-room were Captain and Mrs. Charlton's dressing-rooms, both of which could be entered from the passage, and both of which had doors leading into the sitting-room, while the bedroom had a door giving access to another passage, and it was through this door she had left last night while her mistress and her companion were in the sitting room.

The Countess Galbraith was the next to give evidence, and she was so much overcome with grief that she could hardly speak. The deceased lady had been a cousin of hers, and the last time she saw her alive was in the ball-room at a little before twelve o'clock. She had come up to her and complained of not feeling very well—had fancied she had danced too much, and announced her intention of seeking out her husband, and getting him to take her upstairs, where she said she should rest for half-an-hour before coming down to supper. Lady Galbraith had advised her to do so, and when she saw her next, she was dead.

The Coroner begged leave to put a question. Was Lady Galbraith quite sure of the time? Yes, quite sure. Supper was to have been served at twelve, and it was before that, so she was enabled to fix it accurately.

Then Bertie himself stood up, and a great hush fell upon the assembled company, while everyone peered forward to get a glimpse of him. He was very pale and agitated; he had not shaved that morning, and there was a general haggardness about his appearance that formed a very great contrast to his usual demeanour. He looked, in fact, ten years older than he had looked the preceding night.

He repeated what he had told Mr. Proctor, namely, that he danced the lancers with his wife, and then left her talking to Mr. Delamere, who happened to be her partner for the next dance. After that he had not seen her alive.

"With whom did you dance the next valse?" asked the Coroner, referring to some notes before him.

"With Miss Somers—Lady Galbraith's governess," he answered at once.

"And after that did you dance again?"

"No."

"And you did not remain in the ball-room?"

"No."

"Where did you go to?"

"Upstairs to my dressing-room."

"And how long did you stay there?"

"I cannot say—ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, perhaps."

"Then you were there while your wife was in the adjoining sitting room?"

"No—at least, if she was there, I did not know of her presence."

As a matter of fact, Bertie had gone downstairs just five minutes before Adeline came up, but this he was not in a position to state. "And on leaving your dressing-room, where did you go?"

Bertie answered without hesitation. He had made up his mind that Aline must, at all hazards, be saved from the consequence of his imprudence, no matter what the risk to himself might be.

"I went out into the plantation," he said, deliberately, and a slight murmur of astonishment was audible at his reply.

"Having changed your dress?"

"Having changed my dress."

"That was a strange thing for you to do, was it not, Captain Charlton?"

Bertie made no reply. Now he came to think the circumstance over, he was ready to confess that it was strange, but it had not struck him in that light before.

"Why, may I ask," continued the Coroner, "did you go into the plantation?"

"Because I wanted a walk—I was tired of being indoors, I suppose," Bertie answered, but even to himself the excuse sounded weak.

"H'm!" muttered the Coroner, with a look of incredulity. "Do you recognise these garments?" he added, as one of the policemen produced the Toreador costume Charlton had worn the night before.

Yes—at least, hesitating as he saw the condition of the clothes, "my costume was a Spanish one, but it was new, and not soiled like those things are," for the garments were crumpled and dingy, and—what was that dark red stain upon them. Surely, it was blood!

"Do you mean to deny that these are yours?" said the Coroner, sternly.

"I do not deny it. I say they are like mine, but I cannot understand how they got in that condition."

After this it was intimated that the officer's examination was over, and he sat down; but as he looked round the robin it struck him that a subtle change had come over the familiar faces about him—they were turned away, or they looked at him coldly and sternly. There was very little sympathy visible amongst them.

Oppressed by some vague dread—some nameless fear that he could not put into words—he sat still, while the hall-porter was examined.

This man's evidence was short and to the point. He had been sitting near the front door during the whole of the evening, and he was prepared to swear that no one—neither Captain Charlton nor anyone else—left the Castle by the principal entrance between the hours of eleven and one. If they went out, they must have gone by another way.

Then came a policeman named Dyke, who said he had been called to the Castle that morning at two a.m.—that was after the murder had been committed. Captain Charlton had remained in his dressing-room during most of the night, but on his departure he (Dyke) had searched it, and had discovered the Toreador dress pushed behind a large wardrobe that the room contained. It was all crushed and crumpled up, and there were stains of blood upon it.

After this the Coroner proceeded to sum up, and, as Bertie heard him, an idea of the awful truth burst upon him, almost overwhelming him with its horror.

He pointed out that the last words uttered by the deceased lady had been her declaration that she intended to find her husband and get him to take her upstairs to her sitting-room, where she purposed resting for awhile. No one had noticed her going upstairs, but her maid testified to having heard her in conversation with a gentleman, whom she imagined to be Captain Charlton. And, indeed, her idea was quite natural, for who would be likely to accompany her to her private sitting-room except her own husband?

Captain Charlton, however, denied that he had seen her after she left the ball-room,

although he confessed that he was in his dressing-room at between half-past eleven and a quarter to twelve—about the time the lady went upstairs.

"Gentlemen," said the Coroner, "it is not my duty to prejudice you either for or against Captain Charlton, but it is my duty to remind you that, for no ostensible reason, he changed his masquerading attire for one which would more entirely disguise him, and then went out into the plantation—to say the least, a strange thing to do, when the ground was covered with snow, and the thermometer at zero! Evidently, too, he made his exit by some side door, for you have heard the hall porter swear that he did not pass through the principal entrance. Of the hiding of the Toreador dress he says nothing, neither does he attempt an explanation of the blood stains found upon it. You will also remember that, according to Lady Galbraith's evidence, Captain Charlton had a wound on his hand, which was dripping with blood when he entered the Castle, after the murder, and he offers no explanation. I will also recall to your mind what the lady's maid, Selina Hill, said with regard to the relations existing between the dead lady and her husband, and leave you to form your own conclusion in the matter."

After a few more remarks, all of the same tenor, the jury retired to consider their verdict, and in the interval a dead silence reigned in the library. Everyone seemed afraid to speak—seemed afraid to look at his neighbour, and not a single remark was addressed to Bertie himself, who remained with his arms folded over his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ground, apparently lost in deep thought.

When the jury returned, a thrill of excitement was felt by everyone. They had taken such a short time to consult that it was clear they must be unanimous in their opinion. And this was, indeed, the case, for their verdict was:—

"We find that the deceased, Adeline Augusta Charlton, died from the effects of a blow produced by a knife or dagger, and that, in our opinion, the blow was struck by her husband, Herbert Charlton, Captain in the —th regiment, against whom we return a verdict of wilful murder!"

And as they ceased speaking a detective in plain clothes, who had been present during the whole of the proceedings, stepped forward and laid his hand heavily on Charlton's shoulder.

"I arrest you, in the King's name!"

CHAPTER IX.

Poor Bertie! His position was, indeed, a terrible one, and the charge against him so serious, that when brought up before the magistrates they at once refused to take bail for his reappearance, and he was accordingly lodged in the county gaol, there to ponder undisturbed on the chances of escape.

That the evidence against him was of a very serious nature he himself could see, and another thing also made itself clear—namely, that most of his so-called friends thought him guilty. He could now see the gist of Mr. Proctor's questions on the night of the murder, and Sydney Borlase's innuendoes, which, at the time, had not struck him as meaning anything particular. A few people remained true to him, and asserted their belief in his innocence—the Countess and Ronald Galbraith amongst the number.

"I have known him from boyhood—we were at Eton together," said the latter, when speaking with Mr. Proctor regarding the murder, "and I am quite certain that he is incapable of such a crime as murder. He may have been a little wild—run through his money, and all that sort of thing—but he is the most honourable fellow in the world, and the kindest-hearted."

"That may be," returned the barrister, doubtfully, "and for all that, he may, in a moment of passion, have been carried out of himself, and struck the fatal blow. My ex-

perience has been longer than yours, and I know human nature better than you do."

"You don't understand Bertie Charlton as well."

Mr. Proctor nodded sagely, and looked unconvinced.

"Time will prove, but meanwhile things look very black against him, as you yourself must see. In crimes of this description one has to look for a motive, and here we have the fact that the husband did not care for the wife; that the wife was constantly nagging and tormenting him, and that her death would put him in possession of a considerable sum of money—for, as Mrs. Charlton has not made a will, her personal property, which amounts to a good deal, will all go to her husband, while the landed estates—also worth a good deal—go to her cousin, Sydney Borlase, who is her heir-at-law."

"That husband and wife did not agree is beyond dispute. Then, again, we have Bertie's mysterious disappearance from the ball-room, his change of attire, and the fact of his hiding his Toreador dress because of the stains of blood that would have betrayed so much. His manner, too, when we met him in the shrubbery, was very strange, and that cut on his hand—ho says it was a scratch, but it may have been a wound from the knife. No, I am of opinion that Captain Charlton will be found guilty."

"And condemned to death?"

"Certainly! There can be no other sentence when the verdict is one of wilful murder!"

Ronald groaned aloud. His own troubles—the loss of Cecile—were forgotten in the awful calamity that had befallen his friend.

"Proctor!" he exclaimed, laying his hand on the barrister's arm, "you must defend him, whether you believe him guilty or not. We all know your skill in these criminal cases, and if any man can get him off, that man is yourself!"

Mr. Proctor looked doubtful. Evidently the task imposed on him was very little to his taste, and he would have evaded it if possible.

But Ronald would take no denial. His faith in the barrister's talent was great, and he insisted on its being employed on his friend's behalf.

"All right," said Proctor, at last. "I suppose I must undertake it, and I will do my best, but do not be sanguine of success. I doubt if the cleverest man at the bar could get Bertie Charlton acquitted. However, I'll do my best, and, first of all, I must have an interview with Charlton. A great deal will depend upon the finding of the weapon with which the poor woman was murdered."

"Perhaps it never will be found," observed Ronald, but at this the barrister shook his head.

"I don't agree with you. No one who has not tried it knows the difficulty of getting rid of any article, however trifling. Of course, if a thing can be burnt, there is an end of it, but you can't thus dispose of a knife or dagger; and I have few doubts that the weapon is still in existence, although it may be difficult to get at it. If I were a detective on the other side, and acquainted with the circumstances of the case, I should say Captain Charlton's visit to the plantation was for the purpose of burying it there."

"Good heavens!"

"No doubt," continued the barrister, imper turbably, "the idea will not strike those duffers; but as soon as the snow goes I shall, myself, institute a minute search in the plantation. At present it is impossible."

For the snow still lay heavily on the ground, and showed no signs of melting, even after the New Year had come in.

It was a very sad New Year's Day at Galbraith Castle. All the guests had departed save Mr. Proctor, and the Countess would have gone too, but for some instinct of loyalty towards Bertie, which made her fancy it would

look like desertion if she went away while his fate was so undecided.

"I could not have believed such trouble could come upon us all," she observed to her brother-in-law. "It is true it never rains but it pours, and there is nothing but sorrow, whichever way I turn:—That poor little Miss Somers is so ill that her life is despaired of."

"Indeed!" Ronald said, sympathetically. "I am very sorry for her. She seemed a sweet little thing."

"She has been delirious ever since the day after the murder"—the Countess's voice instinctively sank—"and she is constantly calling out for 'Bertie, Bertie.' I am afraid the poor child was in love with him. I sometimes wonder whether she could throw any light on the events of that awful night."

"What do you mean?" asked Ronald, startled, and the Countess nervously drew back.

"Oh, nothing! It was only a fancy of mine. I don't in the least suppose there is anything in it."

Neither did Ronald at the time, but it recurred to him afterwards very forcibly.

In the meantime fresh evidence had been gathered.

One of the servants, whom timidity had kept back at the inquest, now came forward, and said that she had seen a lady and gentleman go into Mrs. Charlton's sitting-room at about a quarter to twelve on the night of the murder.

The servant was a kitchen-maid, named Susan Mills, and she had no business upstairs at all. It was partly this reason that had kept her silent at the inquest; for thinking there was no danger of anyone observing her, she had determined to take the opportunity of seeing the upper part of the Castle, and the splendid dresses of the lady visitors, which the other servants had described to her.

This girl's evidence was of the greatest importance, for she was singularly clear with regard to facts. It seemed that directly she had observed the lady and gentleman coming upstairs she had hidden behind a statue, and she declared that, just as she did so, she heard the great clock of the stables chiming out the three-quarters, and this enabled her to fix the time. Fearing detection if she came out, and thinking that the lady and gentleman would probably soon go downstairs again, she remained behind the statue, and while there she heard a sound from inside the sitting-room that seemed like a deep groan. It was not repeated, but some minutes later, the door opened and the gentleman came out—alone.

As he came out the stable clock struck twelve!

So far the girl was quite positive, and she added that she was still behind the statue when, five minutes afterwards, Mrs. Charlton's maid entered the room, and found her mistress dead.

Thus the time that the fatal blow must have been struck was fixed beyond a doubt as having been between a quarter to twelve and twelve o'clock, and this was a very great help to those striving to elucidate the mystery of Adeline Charlton's death.

When it came to questioning the girl Mills regarding the appearance of the gentleman who had accompanied the murdered woman, all she could say was that he was tall, and wore a black mask and a black dress. On these points she was quite clear, and here her evidence did not tally with the theory for the prosecution.

"If," said Mr. Proctor, speaking to Galbraith on the subject, "if Charlton wore his black domino when he struck the blow, how is it that the Toreador dress is stained with blood? This is certainly a point in your friend's favour."

During his interview with Bertie in the prison, he told the officer what Susan Mills said. Bertie listened with the apathy that had fallen upon him since his apprehension, and did not seem to lay much stress on the kitchen-maid's testimony.

"I don't see that it does me either good or harm," he observed, indifferently. "I had changed my Toreador dress before a quarter to twelve, and wore a mask and black domino similar to those the girl describes."

"Then how did the Spanish dress get stained?" shrewdly asked the barrister, on the alert for any admission into which his client might be betrayed; for, to tell the truth, he would have been very glad to satisfy himself whether Charlton was really innocent or guilty. His own opinion leaned to the latter hypothesis.

"How can I tell?" Bertie demanded. "The same hand that killed my wife threw suspicion on me by dabbling my clothes in blood, I suppose."

"Well, then," said Mr. Proctor, laying down his forefinger emphatically, "the case now lies in a nutshell. It is quite impossible to dispute the girl Mills's evidence, and she swears that she heard what must have been your wife's dying groan between the three-quarters and the hour. If you can prove that at that time you were somewhere else an alibi is made out, and you are a free man."

The change in the officer's face did not escape Mr. Proctor's practised eye. The quarter of an hour alluded to Bertie knew he had spent in Aline's room in the Tower, but he could not say this.

"If my freedom depends on that I am doomed," he returned, gloomily.

"But do you not know where you were at that time?"

"Yes—I know."

"But you won't tell me?"

"No," Bertie answered, steadily, "I will neither tell you nor anyone else."

The barrister got up in some excitement, and paced the narrow limits of the cell.

"I'm sure I don't know what you expect me or anyone else to do for you if you persevere in this obstinacy," he muttered, angrily. "Here am I doing my best to get you off, and you not only decline to help me, but actually throw obstacles in my way!"

"I am very sorry," the young man said, his pale face flushing. "But I have no alternative but silence."

The lawyer stood still and looked at him attentively out of his keen grey eyes.

"I suppose you are aware that that is equivalent to a confession of guilt?"

"It is not," Charlton exclaimed, with quiet emphasis. "I give you my word of honour—I swear you the most solemn oath—that I am as innocent of my wife's death as you yourself!"

"And as ignorant of her murderer?" queried Mr. Proctor, impressed, despite his cynicism, by the prisoner's manner.

"And as ignorant of her murderer," repeated Bertie, in the same quietly assured tone.

"You have no suspicions?"

Bertie hesitated a moment. Several times a wild idea flashed across his mind with regard to the crime, but he had dismissed it as unworthy.

"No," he returned. "Until to-day I fancied the murderer must have come in search of jewels, and have been interrupted by my wife."

"That has struck me, too," said Mr. Proctor. "It is quite possible that the news of the ball had spread all over the country, and offered itself as a tempting opportunity to the professional burglar, who, in a mask and domino, would run small risk of detection. But that theory is upset by the fact of Mrs. Charlton taking the man into her sitting-room; and my opinion now is that it is in the circle of the Castle itself that we must look for the assassin."

Bertie acquiesced, but threw out no suggestions; and Mr. Proctor went away, convinced of his innocence (for the way in which he had declared it had satisfied the barrister that he spoke the truth), but deeply incensed at his refusal to be perfectly candid with his legal adviser.

"There is something behind—some inner mystery that I must clear up!" he said, when giving Lady Galbraith and Ronald an account of the interview. "No doubt he has some powerful reason for keeping silence, and ten to one a woman is at the bottom of it. Yes. It is a case of 'Cherchez la femme'!"

The Countess started and exchanged a quick glance with her brother-in-law, which the barrister perceived.

"Well, Lady Galbraith, what is it?"

"Nothing," the Countess answered, evasively. "An idea struck me—that is all."

"Will you not communicate it to me?"

"It won't help you, I am afraid."

"Permit me to be the best judge of that."

"Well," answered the Countess, thus pressed. "I noticed on the night of the ball that my governess, Miss Somers, disappeared from the room at about the same time as Captain Charlton, and did not come in again afterwards. The next morning she was delirious. Of course, it may be merely an accidental coincidence, but the two knew each other some time ago, and I fancy Mrs. Charlton was a little jealous of the governess."

"I must see this girl—at once!" exclaimed Mr. Proctor, impulsively, but Lady Galbraith shook her head.

"Impossible, Mr. Proctor. She is still very ill—so ill that no one is allowed to go near her save the nurse and doctor, and her life hangs on the merest thread of hope."

"Tiresome girl!" said the barrister, with an egotism of which he was quite unconscious. "Directly she gets better, let me know."

The question that Bertie himself had been longing to ask was if Aline was still at the Castle, but he had refrained lest, by so doing, he betrayed his interest in the young girl. However, the day after his interview with Mr. Proctor, Lady Galbraith herself wrote to him, and in her letter she mentioned the fact of the governess's illness. Bertie groaned as he read it.

"I think I am doomed to bring misfortune upon her!" he muttered, but at the same time his resolve was confirmed to go to an ignominious death rather than sully her name by letting it be dragged through the Law Courts, and defamed by the newspapers.

Of proving his own innocence he had little hope. Circumstances were so fearfully against him that it seemed impossible to overcome them, especially as in the one important point his tongue was tied.

What a wasted life his had been all through! he thought, bitterly. If the time were only given him, he would redeem the past by a very different future.

But that could hardly be—the future, as he saw it, was too terrible to be dwelt upon.

CHAPTER X.

Directly after the magistrates' inquiry, Sydney Borlase had left the Castle for London, when he went to his old rooms in Jermyn Street. He was a rich man now—heir to a large estate, which would bring him in not less than three thousand a year; and the duns who had persecuted him so unmercifully a little while ago were obsequious enough now that they knew their money was safe.

Sydney Borlase felt freer and more independent than he had been for years, and if remorse ever came upon him he drove it back with fierce determination, and refused to let it make him its prey. It is true he could not go out into society much, so soon after his cousin's death, and while Bertie Charlton's fate trembled in the balance, but he managed to amuse himself in a quiet way, and he also contrived an interview with Lady Cecile Craven—who saw him because she was anxious to hear the latest news about Bertie.

Borlase found her much changed, even in this short time. She looked pale and worn, and there were dark circles under her eyes, that used not to be there.

She listened very eagerly while Sydney told her full particulars of the murder, and afterwards expressed her opinion very decidedly in favour of Bertie's innocence.

"I am afraid you are wrong," Borlase said, slightly shrugging his shoulders. "I do not see how one can doubt his guilt."

Cecile, however, refused to accept this view; and so, with his usual tact, Borlase changed the subject for one more interesting to him. He told Cecile how dearly he loved her, and implored her to give him some prospect of eventually gaining her affection.

"I dare not approach you before," he said, "for I was too poor to hope to obtain your parents' consent. But it is different now. I am a comparatively rich man, and I love you more than ever."

What he would have added it is impossible to say, for Cecile interrupted him indignantly enough. What did it matter to her whether he was rich or poor? she asked. If she ever loved a man she would marry him without asking of his rent-roll. But she had no intention of marrying—in fact, she had made up her mind to be single all her life, and so she unequivocally declined the honour Mr. Borlase had offered her.

As she said this she trembled a little, for Sydney fixed upon her those dark, penetrating eyes of his, and their evil gaze disturbed her, with the queer fascination which they always exercised over her.

"You have not forgotten Ronald Galbraith yet—the man who deceived you so cruelly?" he said, with his slow, sardonic smile. "You love him still."

"Yes," she answered boldly, "I love him still, and although I shall probably never see him again, I shall go on loving him as long as I live."

And saying this she hurried from the room, for it seemed to her that if she remained with him any longer Sydney might, by the mere force of his evil will, persuade her into consenting to anything he liked to urge.

Borlase went away disappointed, but he did not despair of success. He told himself he had been too eager—he ought to have waited at least for three months, and by that time Cecile would have got over her fancy for Ronald.

"Never mind," he muttered, consolingly. "Later on I will try again, and I have small doubts that I shall succeed. A strong will can do a good deal, especially when it is not held back by that foolish thing which people call conscience."

He had arranged to go down to Galbraith Castle on the day before the one fixed for Charlton's trial at the Assizes, so as to be present during the progress of the trial, and on that same afternoon the poor Countess was sitting alone in her boudoir, wondering what this time to-morrow would bring forth. She was very sincerely attached to Bertie, and the thought of his probable fate filled her with something akin to despair, for, as far as she could see, his conviction was a certainty. It was about four o'clock, and the winter evening was beginning to close in. Outside it was grey and dreary enough, but the boudoir was bright with firelight, which leapt and danced in fantastic shadows on the walls and ceiling.

Suddenly the door opened, and Ronald Galbraith came in. At the sight of his face Lady Galbraith started up, for it was even more expressive of misery than it had been before.

"Ronald, what is it? Some fresh trouble, I am sure."

"I am afraid so, Charibel," he answered, seating himself opposite, with a deep sigh. "And the trouble will fall heavier on you than anyone else. My dear sister"—he spoke with unusual affection—"nothing but the sternest necessity would justify me in disclosing to you what it is now my duty to tell, but when a human life is at stake everything else must give way. I am sure you agree with me."

"Then it is something to do with Bertie that you are going to tell me?"

"Yes, it has to do with him, but before I come to his part of the story I shall have to go back a long way. Do you remember telling

me that you were sure the Tower contained some secret of mine?"

"Yes," returned the Countess, growing red, and wondering what this had to do with the matter.

"Well, you were right, and what that secret is you will now hear. In the top rooms of the Tower, for the last seven years, a woman has been confined."

"I suspected it," murmured Lady Galbraith, not looking at him.

"Her name was originally Margaretta Visconti, and she was an actress—by birth an Italian. Her mother, however, was American, and she herself spent a good many years of her life in America. When he was very young—nineteen or twenty—my brother Marmaduke met her, and fell in love with her—"

"Marmaduke—my husband!" repeated the Countess, in accents of astonishment.

"Yes, but he was not an earl then, for my uncle was alive, and had a son, who it was confidently expected would succeed to the title. Well, to go on with my story. Marmaduke was so desperately in love with this woman, who was some years older than himself, that he determined to marry her directly he came of age, and he did so."

The Countess started up, her face as white as the big arm lily beside her; but Ronald, with gentle force, pushed her back on her chair, and knelt at her side, keeping his hand still upon her arm.

"My poor Charibel, listen to the end before you say anything or before you judge my dead brother. Believe me, he paid most dearly for his folly! He and this woman were secretly married at a registrar's office in London, and directly afterwards they went abroad together, where they stayed until all his money was gone, and he was altogether penniless."

"Then his wife ran away and left him, and shortly afterwards he read an account of her death in the newspapers. She had been a passenger in a train to which an accident happened, and her name appeared in the list of killed. As a matter of fact, beyond natural feelings of humanity at her sad end, Marmaduke did not grieve for her. By this time his short love dream had been rudely dispelled, and he saw her in her true colours—a hard, unprincipled woman, who cared for nothing but money and the luxury it brought, and who had married him simply because she knew he had a fortune, which was entirely at his own disposal."

"When that was gone she no longer cared to remain with him, and, as I said before, she deserted him. Well, time went on, and Marmaduke returned to England, where no one knew of his ill-fated marriage except myself; and as no good could come of announcing it, he resolved to keep it secret. Then he saw you, and knew what love really was, and in due time you were married, with—as it seemed—every prospect of happiness, although he was then a poor man, and had no expectations in particular to look forward to. Twelve months after your marriage, as you know, our poor cousin—the heir to the earldom—died, and his father was so grieved by his loss that in less than a year he followed him to the grave, and Marmaduke himself inherited the title and estates. Then your children were born, and you and they went away to your father's house in the South of France, while your husband stayed here at the Castle."

"During your absence a very terrible thing happened, inasmuch as Marmaduke received a letter from a London doctor, telling him that a patient of his, who called herself Margaretta Galbraith, and was now insane, was always calling out for him, and declared herself to be his wife. Marmaduke, in a state of mind which I leave you to guess, hurried to London, and there saw that the woman in question was really the Margaretta Visconti whom he had married! He afterwards ascertained that she had been in the railway accident of which he had heard, but had not been seriously injured, although a blow that she received on her head injured her memory, and afterwards resulted in insanity."

"Of course the question now arose as to what he should do, and, as you will readily understand, he was driven half distracted. Finally, he decided to keep his first wife's existence secret, and in thus deciding I cannot help thinking he was wrong. However, the position was indeed most terrible and every allowance is to be made for him. If he declared his first marriage it meant disgrace for you and his children; whereas, by keeping it secret, he did not wrong Margaretta, who was unconscious of what was going on around her, and was even ignorant that Marmaduke had succeeded to the earldom."

"Her state of mind was peculiar, inasmuch as she had lucid intervals, during which her faculties were as keen as yours or mine; and for this reason Marmaduke decided not to send her to an asylum for fear of what she might disclose, but—at all events for the present—to bring her to the Castle, and let her remain in the Tower, which had the reputation of being haunted, and was avoided by the servants and others on that account. He was the more encouraged to do this because you disliked the Castle, and had declared your intention of not visiting it more frequently than you were obliged; and so here the poor woman was brought, and no one knew of her presence save Doctor Copeland, who attended her, and my brother's old nurse, Joan Thwaites, who waited on her—and both of these were sworn to secrecy."

"As it happened, the plan succeeded very well. Margaretta made herself happy enough in her new home, took an interest in the birds and flowers that were provided for her, and was not dissatisfied, so long as she had what she liked to eat and drink. Joan Thwaites proved an excellent guardian, and no one suspected the truth."

"Then poor Marmaduke was taken ill, and feeling he should not recover, he revealed to me what I have told you, and made me swear to keep it secret—if possible, for ever. At his death the awful responsibility devolved upon me, and how it has weighed me down, you, Charibel, know without my telling you. It was an ever-recurring fear—a burden almost greater than I could bear. It took my youth from me, and made me feel old before my time."

"I felt that I must reside at the Castle, and Marmaduke had provided for that by leaving it clearly stated in his will that the Tower was to be given up to me until his son came of age, so I had had a retort taken up to the top-most room of the Tower, and decided to carry on my chemical studies there, and attend to Margaretta at the same time. My task has been rendered easier by the fact of your never visiting the Castle; and of late I have noticed a great difference in my prisoner. She has been quieter, and her lucid intervals have been much more frequent. As a matter of fact, her insanity has now taken the form of melancholia, and in most things she is as sane as you or I. Under these circumstances I have hardly been able to reconcile it to my conscience to keep her incarcerated, and have lately been debating whether I could not send her abroad with Joan Thwaites, but the risk has deterred me."

"Not only had I my oath to consider, but do you see what would happen if, by any chance, Margaretta made known her marriage?"

The Countess shook her head. She was holding her hands before her face so as to hide its pallor; and, in effect, surprise and horror had rendered her actually incapable of speech.

Ronald's voice fell into a whisper.

"Your marriage with Marmaduke would be declared illegal. Your son could not inherit, and I should be forced to assume the title of Earl of Galbraith."

CHAPTER XI.

A little half stifled cry broke from the poor woman's lips. In her agitation, she had hardly realised the truth before Ronald put it in plain words before her; but even in

that awful moment she was conscious of the noble devotion and unselfishness of her brother-in-law, who had indeed sacrificed every hope in life on her behalf.

"My quarrel with Lady Cecil was on this account," he went on, feeling that now he had gone so far it was best that she should know everything. "By some means Sydney Borlase had got hold of a former valet of mine, who told him something of Margaretta, but he put me in my brother's place, and on Borlase making a search at Somerset House he found the record of the marriage that had taken place. You will remember that Marmaduke's first name was 'Ronald,' but he was never called by it. 'Ronald' had been our father's name, and our mother insisted on both of us bearing it; hence, when Cecil saw the certificate, she very naturally supposed it was I who had been married, and I dared not undeceive her!"

"And you sacrificed this hope too?" cried Lady Galbraith, sobbing. "Oh, Ronald, you are indeed noble, and I have been suspecting you of a very different secret!"

He pressed her hand affectionately.

"We will not speak of your suspicions, Claribel. I must go on with my history, for I have a most important question to put to you presently."

"As I said before, for the last few weeks Margaretta has quite recovered her reason, and I have satisfied her curiosity so far as to tell her that Marmaduke was dead, and I, as his brother, had taken upon myself the task of looking after her. I also told her that I was permitted by Lord Galbraith to reside in the Tower; but that if her presence was suspected, this permission would be taken from me, and she is, of course, unaware that Marmaduke ever succeeded to the title. She fancies she is entirely dependent on my generosity, and therefore has no desire to displease me."

"I have just found out that she has lately taken to wandering about at night, so I set myself to discover how she got out of her room—for I need not say that we always took care to securely fasten the door—and I find there is a secret staircase leading from the room in the Tower to the one now occupied by Miss Somers, and of this staircase Margaretta learned the secret."

"The door leading to it is concealed behind the tapestry, and opens with a spring, and the one in the lower room is similarly constructed, and similarly hidden."

"How many visits Margaretta has paid to Miss Somers' apartments I cannot tell, but she has not penetrated farther than the passage beyond; for, as you know, there is at the end of it a door leading to the Castle, and this I lock every night and unlock every morning."

"On the night of the ball I was forced to leave it unfastened because of Miss Somers, and on that night Margaretta went into the governess's room, and on that young lady's entrance hid herself behind the tapestry in the aperture of the open door."

"She was then witness to an interview that took place between Miss Somers and Captain Charlton, and the time must have been identical with that quarter-of-an-hour for which Bertie refuses to account. I myself can prove that, for as it happened, I went up to the Tower at exactly twelve o'clock, and it was then I discovered Margaretta's absence and the existence of the secret passage. She came up shortly after my entrance, but did not say a word as to what she had seen, and it was only to-day that I learned the truth—and that through a complete accident. It seems that yesterday old Joan had taken a newspaper to the Tower with her, and left it there. In it Margaretta read an article on the coming trial, and the curious fact that if the accused would only say where he was between a quarter to twelve and twelve o'clock he could prove an alibi. To-day she showed this article to me, and asked me if the Captain Charlton referred to was the same as she had seen in the governess's room—for she had heard Miss Somers address her visitor by

that name. I said 'yes,' and then she told me of the interview she had witnessed."

Ronald came to a pause. The Countess remained crouching down near the fire, her face still hidden, but her whole form trembling violently. The shock to her was terrible—it seemed as if death itself would have been preferable to the awful disgrace that threatened her and her children.

"Claribel," went on Galbraith, after a few minutes' silence, "if Margaretta is permitted to give evidence she will save poor Bertie's life. It is for you to say whether she shall or not!"

All honour to the Countess that, in this supreme moment, no thought of herself—no thought of loss of fame, fortune, and even name—had power to blind her to justice!

"She shall give evidence!" she exclaimed, without hesitation. "Whatever the consequences to us may be, Bertie's life must be saved!"

Ronald bent down and kissed her hand, but said nothing.

Half-an-hour later the inmate of the Tower was brought to Lady Galbraith's boudoir, and Claribel saw, for the first time, the woman whose name and title she herself had borne for so many years.

The first wife of the late Earl was a tall, dark, thin woman, with restless eyes, and the remains of great beauty. Her age was somewhere about forty, but she looked older—an effect partly due to the melancholia from which she now suffered, and partly to the life she had led in her earlier years.

Claribel was deeply agitated when she came in. Her emotion would not let her speak, and she could only sign to her visitor to be seated, while she herself turned round to the window, and pretended to look out in order to gain time for calming herself.

It had been decided not to let the unfortunate woman know who her hostess was, but simply to get her to repeat all she knew concerning Bertie, and afterwards to think over the position and the best way of making it public—for if Margaretta appeared in a Court of Justice as witness it would certainly be necessary to say who she really was, and the whole history of the Earl's first marriage must come out.

Before the Countess (as we must still call her) turned from the window an interruption came in the form of a knock at the door, followed by the immediate entrance of Sydney Borlase—who had just arrived at the Castle, and supposed himself to be on too intimate terms with the Galbraiths to require a formal announcement.

As he stood on the threshold the words of greeting that he would have uttered died on his tongue. His face turned livid—even his lips were white, and the cause of this agitation was none other than the sight of Margaretta, seated near the fire facing him. She, on her part, seemed little less moved. She sprang to her feet, looked at him for a moment with dilated eyes, and swept her hand across her brow with the half-puzzled expression of one who tries to catch a fleeting memory. Then she took a step forward, and a loud cry broke from her.

"Sydney—Sydney, it is you—really you—after so many years!" she exclaimed, incoherently; then she sat down again, and began to sob, while Ronald and Claribel stared in astonishment from her to Borlase.

"Who is this woman—what brings her here?" demanded the latter fiercely of Ronald, but it was Margaretta herself who answered the question.

"I am your wife, as you know very well," she said, her tone undergoing a strange alteration as she spoke. She looked defiantly at Ronald, as if she feared he would reproach her. "We were married years ago—many years ago, before I even saw Marmaduke," she added. "Do you remember, it was in a church, Sydney—the only time in my life I have ever been in a church! It is a long while ago, but it seems like yesterday."

An excited look came into Galbraith's eyes. The Countess could not understand the scene, but on her brother-in-law a light was breaking, and bringing with it a flood of hope which promised an end to their present distress.

"You hear what this lady says, Borlase," he said, sternly. "Do you deny it?"

"Deny it!" echoed Margaretta, shrilly, before Sydney had time to speak. "He dare not deny it, for you have only to go to New York to find the church where the marriage took place, and the clergyman who married us—unless," she added, vaguely, "he is dead. It is true," laughing a hard, mirthless laugh that made the Countess shudder involuntarily, "we separated afterwards by mutual consent, and decided never to trouble each other again; but we are man and wife for all that, and I will go back to him now. I am tired of being shut up all day and all night," she continued, in a complaining tone, with a glance at Ronald. "I have been thinking I should like to go back into the world again, and see people, and dance and sing as I used to in the old days when I was Margaretta Visconti. Ah!" she said, a cunning smile playing over her lips, "it was as Margaretta Visconti I was married to Marmaduke Galbraith, but I was married to you, Sydney Borlase, under my own name. All was fair and above board then, and I gave you no chance of saying the marriage was not legal!"

"Curse you!" muttered Borlase, too utterly taken aback by this most unexpected meeting even to attempt a denial of her accusation.

"Then," exclaimed Ronald, his voice rising high with triumphant excitement, "your marriage with my brother was invalid, seeing that at the time it was contracted you had a husband living!"

This was a fact, and, for the enlightenment of the reader, it will be as well to explain that Borlase and Margaretta had first met in New York, where the latter was at that time a favourite burlesque actress, with whom Sydney—just fresh from college and travelling for pleasure—had fallen in love.

After their marriage they soon grew tired of each other, and decided that it would be for their mutual advantage to part, and not trouble each other again.

Borlase remained in America some years longer, while Margaretta came to England, where she met Marmaduke Galbraith, with whom, for the sake of his money, she went through the form of marriage—knowing, of course, that the ceremony was illegal. That, however, did not concern her, for she had no intention of staying with him any longer than his money lasted, and, as we know, she subsequently left him.

Borlase, not hearing of her for so many years, naturally concluded she must be dead, consequently the sight of her in the flesh was as much a surprise as it was a shock to him, and for once his self-possession failed him.

CHAPTER XII.

This afternoon was an eventful one for the Countess and her friends, for almost before the last words were out of Ronald's mouth there entered no less a person than Mr. Proctor, carrying in his hand a black bag.

His quick eye travelled over the little group, whose agitation was visible even to the most casual observer, then his gaze became fixed on Sydney.

"Come down for your cousin's trial, have you?" he said, dispensing with all ordinary greeting. "Well, I hope you will be interested. As it happens, you are the very person I wanted to see. I have a few questions to put to you, and I shall require your undivided attention. Have you ever seen this knife before?" and as he spoke he drew from the bag a curiously-engraved, sharp-pointed dagger, on whose blade was a dark, rusty stain.

Borlase swerved aside as if someone had struck him a blow; then, recovering his self-possession, he answered, boldly:—

"No—I have never seen it in my life before."

"That is a lie!" cried Margaretta, with a disagreeable laugh. "As it happens, it is a Mexican one that I myself gave you fifteen years ago. I will swear to it anywhere."

"Will you?" exclaimed Mr. Proctor, eagerly, and rubbing his hands with delight. "This is unexpected good fortune! I am more obliged to you than I can say, my dear madame. Now, Mr. Borlase, do you still persist in your denial?"

"I refuse to answer your insulting questions, sir," said Sydney, folding his arms and casting a malevolent glance at his wife.

"Indeed! I'm afraid you won't be able to persist in that determination. Little birds that won't speak must be made to speak, as you will find out in good time. Ronald Galbraith," turning to him quickly, "you are a magistrate, are you not?"

"I am," returned Ronald, surprised—for he knew nothing of the barrister's tactics and intentions. Mr. Proctor having maintained a stolid silence with regard to the case for some time.

"Then I require your most undivided attention. This knife was found in the well at the bottom of the plantation, and the stain upon it is blood. Examine its hilt closely—what do you see?"

Ronald obeyed.

"I see a piece of lace and a shred of rose-coloured silk between the blade and the hilt," he answered slowly.

From his bag Mr. Proctor—very methodically and deliberately—produced the bodice of a dress.

"This," he said, "was the bodice worn by Mrs. Charlton on the night of the murder, and if you look at it you will see that when the blow was struck a bit of the lace and silk was torn out. I, myself, would not meddle with the knife, but I wish you to see if the fragments upon it do not correspond with the holes torn in the bodice?"

"Yes," said Ronald. "There cannot be a doubt on the point."

"Then," pursued the barrister, "I think it is clear that this knife is the one with which Mrs. Charlton was murdered, and I can prove, beyond dispute, that it was worn by Mr. Sydney Borlase on the night of the murder."

"It is untrue! You cannot prove it!" cried Sydney, his tone loud and arrogant, and contrasting strangely with his white face.

"You will see," rejoined the barrister, unmoved. "On the night of the ball you were wearing a Mexican dress, and in your belt this dagger was stuck, in a sheath. One of your partners—Lady St. John—noticed it, and you pulled it out of the sheath for her to look at. She was here yesterday examining it, and she is ready to swear to its identity. Now the dance which you had together was the last dance before supper—that is to say, at about half-past eleven—and you were not seen in the ball-room after."

"That was because I threw my black cloak over my masquerading dress, and so was not recognised," said Sydney, hastily.

"Ah! you confess that!" exclaimed the barrister. "Please take note of what Mr. Borlase says, Galbraith. That was an unfortunate admission for you, Mr. Borlase; for here, in my bag, I have that black cloak of yours, which was found with the knife in the bottom of the well."

"There cannot be any question that you yourself put it there on the night of the murder, because of the stains of blood that were upon it. You feared to burn it, and you feared to keep it in your possession; but you were a fool, Mr. Borlase—a fool, I repeat—for any baby would know that the well would be one of the first places examined; and it so happens that on Christmas Eve it was cleaned out, so that when you threw your precious bundle in there was no water in it!"

"I think now we shall be able to procure poor Charlton's release, especially as Mr. Galbraith tells me he has a witness who swears

he was in a room in the Tower from a quarter to twelve to twelve o'clock!"

Mr. Proctor rubbed his hands triumphantly. Lady Galbraith was too agitated by all that had taken place to utter a word.

Margaretta looked from her husband to the others in puzzled wonder, and Ronald stood in front of the door, so as to prevent anyone leaving the room.

"Your story is a tissue of lies from beginning to end!" exclaimed Sydney, after a minute's pause. "The evidence you have brought against me is worth just nothing at all!"

"Softly, softly!" responded the barrister. "It is certain that Mrs. Charlton would not have taken a stranger to her private sitting-room; so, if her companion was not her husband, it follows that it must have been her cousin, and it also follows that the murderer tried to throw suspicion on Bertie Charlton by wiping his knife on the latter's Torsador dress, and pushing the dress behind the wardrobe—a place of concealment that no one who really wished to hide the clothes would ever have thought of, as discovery was certain."

"Under these circumstances, I must ask Mr. Galbraith to sign a warrant for your instant arrest!"

"He will not give it you! he dare not!" panted Sydney, glancing round like some wild animal brought to bay.

"I most certainly shall," returned Ronald, coolly, and he left his station by the door, and went towards the Countess' writing table.

In an instant Sydney was at the door, and, almost before they were aware of his intention, he had opened it, slipped outside, and made his escape—in the very face of the policeman whom Mr. Proctor had stationed at the head of the stairs in case of such an emergency arising.

What disguise he assumed—in what manner he contrived to leave the country—was never known, but leave it he certainly did, and has never returned to it since.

Neither was he penniless, for it was afterwards discovered that he had succeeded in raising a considerable sum of money on the estate he inherited from his cousin, and this he invariably carried on his person, so as to be prepared for any unforeseen emergency.

There is little more to be told, Margaretta Borlase—for such, of course, was her true name—gave evidence the next day at Bertie's trial, and Mr. Proctor also brought forward evidence of Sydney's guilt, which conclusively proved the prisoner's innocence.

Bertie Charlton was acquitted, and left the Court leaning on Ronald Galbraith's arm, Mr. Proctor walking on the other side.

As he stood once more in the open air—a free man—he grasped the hands of both his companions.

"Old friends," he said, his voice so unsteady as to suggest the idea of sobs, "to you, under Heaven, I owe my release. I cannot thank you—words are too weak!"

But the gratitude in his eyes said more than words.

It is Christmas Eve, two years later, and Aline Somers, beautiful as ever, is standing in front of the hall-fire at Galbraith Castle, looking wistfully into the cheerful flame, and wondering what Bertie Charlton will say to her when he comes—for he is to arrive in half-an-hour—and she has not seen him since that awful night, nearly two years ago.

In the interval he has been in active service in South Africa, and he has come home with the title of "Colonel," and half-a-dozen medals by way of decoration.

Aline herself is quite at home at the Castle now. Everyone treats her as one of the family, from the Countess downwards, and, if it were not for one thing, she would be very happy indeed.

Opposite her sits Lady Cecile Galbraith, playing with her six months' old daughter; and Ronald, less grave than of yore, stands by, smiling into the baby's blue eyes, while the proud young mother asks him if she is not

the most wonderful baby he has ever seen in his life!

"Of course she is!" exclaims Lady Galbraith, joining the group with her two children, Rupert and Blanche. "So she will continue to be until she has a brother or sister!"

The Countess herself has not changed at all; but, sometimes, when she thinks of that awful moment when Ronald told her the secret of the Tower, she says she wonders that every hair in her head did not turn grey with fear!

She has taken upon herself the responsibility of Margaretta Borlase, who is now staying in a doctor's family, where she is treated with every kindness and consideration, and is at liberty to come and go as she pleases.

"Hush!" says Lady Galbraith, holding up her finger. "I hear carriage wheels. It must be Bertie. Aline, go into my boudoir, and stay there till I send for you."

Aline, wondering, and a little hurt, obeys; and when, some ten minutes later, she is standing just where the firelight falls on her lovely, wistful face and lustrous eyes, the door opens, and Bertie comes in—Bertie, older, graver, more sunburnt, but with the same honest, grey eyes, the same bright boyish smile as of old.

"Aline!" he says, and at the utterance of her name the sadness falls from her like a mantle; and she knows that at last the dream of her girlhood is fulfilled, and the love which has been the dearest part of her life will now find its redemption.

She goes to him without a word, and their lips meet in one long kiss, that is at once a question and a reply. Words are needless when Love has a more eloquent language.

[THE END.]

MAX O'RELL ON MARRIAGE.

Marriage is doomed to be a failure unless both husband and wife are sensible and practical persons, whose love for each other is lined with a strong, thick coating of devotion and friendship, so that when the cloth begins to wear out the lining may be there ready to protect and shelter them.

It is only the strong and lasting qualities that are guarantees of happiness in matrimonial life. A man may fall in love with a woman on account of her beauty, but it is not her beauty, even if it were equal to that of Venus, that would keep him in love with her. It might help, but alone it will not do it.

What will, or, at any rate, may succeed in doing it, are her amiability, her cheerfulness, her good companionship, her toleration, her appreciation of her husband's character, and of his talents, her devotion to him in times of sickness or trouble.

When girls are romantic they expect husbands to remain lovers for ever and ever. But it is not in man's nature to remain a lover.

A married woman who is clever takes care that a husband is never bored in his house. Only a selfish woman wants to shut up a man all alone with her in a kind of attitude of perpetual adoration of herself. She calls that affection. I call it egotism.

Some men, very few, submit to this sort of demand, and go about held tight in a leash, like unsnipped pointers—but the majority bolt.

Some women, the stupidest of all, have met the "cooling down" of their husbands with reprimands, reprimands, scenes of jealousy, and tears. Of course, in such cases, if there was a particle of love, I mean of passionate love, left in the man, it instantly extinguished it. Love is not obtained for the asking, much less is it revived by scoldings and reproaches.

Marriages have been known to be happy which began with mere sympathy, that became love and even turned into passion; but no marriage has ever been known to be tolerable which began with passion. Matrimony is like a play; the interest must go on increasing from a sober beginning to a climax.

LOVE'S SECRECY

SHORT STORY.



OUR home was in London, Esther's and mine. Esther was papa's ward. We were not wealthy, only "independent," but Esther was very much blessed with gold and lands, and there was an uncommon attachment between us, and she always took me with her when she spent the season at Brighton, or elsewhere, when I could not have gone but for her affectionate kindness.

This summer Esther had declared herself tired and sick of crowds and balls and flattery, and proposed to go to Mrs. Thornby's in the country. Fred had studied his profession in London, and was going into partnership with an eminent lawyer there. We had seen him a great deal. His mother lived in a small house and possessed much landed estate, and where she had often urged us to visit her.

And this is the way it happened that we were at Thornby Cottage yawning the day away, with an occasional walk or ride or excursion. The Coronation had been celebrated in the village of Belleville by a picnic in the woods, and the evening closed respectably with a grand ball at the town hall, which had been adorned for the occasion with a wonderful embellishment of banners and flowers. We really enjoyed it, and for that evening, at least, I had enjoyed the society of Webster Hamilton.

He was polished, educated, and refined, and though he was somewhat wanting in the fulsome flattery of our city courtiers, he possessed a dignity of mien and an expression of candid truth that made his attentions more pleasing than all the hackneyed compliments of the ballroom. I can acknowledge now that I was fairly caught and captivated by his grace and manliness that night, but I did not forget the social bar between us, and so neglected to ask him to call.

Fred chided me for it, said I must learn country manners, and soon invited him to spend the evening. I was needlessly frigid and impolite; refusing to sing or play, and even pleaded a headache as an excuse for refusing a game of bridge. But Esther quite atoned for my coldness by her sparkling cordiality. She made unusual efforts to be winning and agreeable, while the young mechanic assumed an air at once so easy and polite, so free from mauveisme nonie, so much upon the footing of equality, that it was to me absolutely intolerable, and I retired before he left. He had called twice since, and was obviously in love with Esther, and Esther with him. It was all well enough, perhaps, for a summer flirtation, but Esther never flirted. Would she marry him? The idea was preposterous! I made up my mind to interest Fred in the matter, and devise some way to save her from such a fearful fate. My first attempt was unsuccessful.

Next evening Esther and Hamilton went for a ride on horseback. The affair was really becoming serious, and when I mentioned the subject to Fred he was more attentive.

"It is really too bad, Fred, for us to suffer things to go on in this way without at least making an effort to break the spell he has thrown around her. Of course, it is only a strange infatuation, which she will shudder at when she is once free from his power."

"You may be right, Effie"—my name is Effie Morse. "How blind I have been. But what can we do? Esther will have her own way, you know, especially if she thinks anyone wishes to oppose her. What would you do? Women are so shrewd in such matters."

"I don't know, I'm sure. How would a little well-directed sarcasm do?"

"Oh, I have it now. Suppose you cut her out—make it appear as though Hamilton was suddenly taken with you—fickle-minded, you

know. That would pique her vanity, so that she would treat him accordingly. She can't bear neglect."

"Nonsense, Fred; you know that couldn't be done, as long as Esther is worth half a million and beautiful as a dream, and I am poor, plain and disagreeable, unless you could make him think I am the heiress—no, he is no such fellow. That wouldn't do."

"Oh, of course, I don't suppose you could really turn Hamilton's affections from Esther to you, but we could manoeuvre a little to have you walk and ride together, and though I would be the real general, we could make it appear to be his preference. A few hints from me to Esther upon his sudden change would make it all right. That would be glorious. You keep quiet, and I will take charge of Esther. You can afford to be agreeable to the fellow for a while; if he really falls in love with you, no matter. He deserves some punishment for his presumption."

I had some misgivings about trusting myself within the influence of his wiles, but as he was by no means a disagreeable companion I finally consented, for Esther's sake.

Whenever he called afterwards Fred would manage to call Esther away, and leave me the task of entertaining him. Sometimes his eyes would follow her, as she went away, but nothing else indicated his displeasure. I began to feel the magnetic power of his dark, expressive eye, and feared for myself. There was often a dull, painful pressure about my heart, absolutely distressing.

One night he asked me if I would grant him a private interview in the morning; he was going away, and he had something to tell me that I must hear. I was terribly frightened, and stammered something which he took for assent. As soon as he was gone I sought Fred and told him my fearful dilemma.

"I cannot see him, Fred. It is no more than right, since you proposed this shameful scheme, that you should help me out of it, and I want you to see him in the morning, and tell him the whole plan, I cannot."

Fred showed all the consistent sympathy of his sex, and replied coolly,—

"Pon my honour, now, I don't see what I have got to do with it. It would be confoundedly awkward for me to interfere. Web and I were always good friends, but what do you care for a dirty mechanic?"

Alone in the silence of the night, with an agony of bitter tears, my proud heart bowed to the sceptre of love. Esther! My friend, my sister—she, too, loved him.

Pale and cold as marble I sat by the window to await his coming, and for the first time he seemed dear to me, dearer than life itself—but my sacred honour was dearer still.

Fred and Esther had gone out to shoot at a target at the further end of the garden; Mrs. Thornby was in the kitchen, and I was alone. Presently he rode into the avenue upon his mettlesome steed—a finer figure never rode—and my heart leaped into a wild tumult of pride, pleasure, and pain.

He saw me and raised his hat with a beaming smile. At that instant a pistol report frightened the fiery animal, and he reared high in the air, turned and dashed homeward, riderless.

I never knew how I reached him, but I remember a still form lying on the grass, and I was clasping the dear head in my arms, laying my cheek against his brow, entreating him in the wildest terms of despair and endearment to look up and say he was not dead.

I called to Fred and Esther, but before they could reach us the dark eyes unclosed and strong arms encircled me.

"Effie, my precious darling, do you love me?" he asked in low tones of the tenderest emotion.

I forgot Esther and all my vows of renunciation in that fearful fright, and only said—

"God knows I do, Mr. Hamilton."

He was not hurt, and was on his feet, just

as Fred and Esther arrived, but I had fainted. out.

Returning consciousness found me reclining on the sofa with my head pillowed in the arms of Webster Hamilton, Esther bathing my face with cologne, Fred knocking down chairs, spilling water on the furniture, and making himself generally useful.

I tried to rise, but the encircling arms imprisoned me, and Fred and Esther suddenly left us alone. Then he told me he had loved me from the first, but I was so cold and rude that he could not tell me so. Then Fred suggested a flirtation with Esther as the surest way of bringing me to my senses. He did not approve of it at all, but they had managed it all their own way.

"And you really didn't love Esther at all?" I eagerly asked.

"I really love nobody but you, and never expect to," sealing the avowal very impressively upon my lips. "And could you, city born and bred, marry a poor mechanic, Effie?"

"I think I might, if that poor mechanic happened to be Webster Hamilton."

"Fred Thornby," I began, "you perfidious, ambiguous, ridiculous, deceitful hypocrite! I will never forgive you just as long as I live. Never—if I live a thousand years!"

Fred took a turn up and down the room, shrugged his shoulders, and asked Hamilton if he had told me all.

"I believe so—nearly," laughing.

"About the dirty mechanic?"

I winced.

"No—I left that for you."

"Not all. What about Esther?" she asked, coming forward in her bewitchery of smiles and coquetry, and going to Fred's side. He put his arm about her, and said—

"There's a report afloat, Miss Horton, that you, with all your beauty and wealth and good taste have actually thrown yourself away upon a poor mechanic. Esther, I am ashamed of you. Your father must know of this."

"Oh, no, Fred dear; it isn't a mechanic at all. Oh, no."

She leaned her head against his shoulder and I saw all, and my lip quivered as I turned to Esther, and said—

"Et tu, Brute!"

Esther's arms were around me, and her evident sorrow and Webster's sincere repentance of his part in the masquerade, quite won me back to her contentment again.

But Fred never repented. On the contrary, he boasts of his superior generalship to this day. And when he told me the next day that Webster's father was the sole proprietor of the iron works, he made the very elegant and ambiguous addendum—

"I used to think donkeys were the most stupid creatures in the world—but there!"

SPOILED SERVANTS.—In France it is said that Americans spoil their servants; they are careless as to money, too good-natured, and lavish with holidays, and the French servant who returns from service in the United States is regarded as one that is spoiled. In France, or, rather, in Paris, where the highest wages are paid for general housework, the girls receive at the most ten dollars a month, and they are allowed but one afternoon a month out. They do a great deal of work never asked of a girl in America—brushing clothes, household mending, doing of errands, and the daily marketing. On the other hand, they do no family washing, all bread, cakes, and desserts are procured outside of the house, as well as many entrées, meat, and fowls, and it is even possible to buy cooked vegetables, so that really there is much less work in the kitchen. Then, too, with the hardwood floors and rugs, there is less, or, at least, lighter, work in caring for the apartments, which offsets the household mending, shoe-blackening, and marketing.

Gleanings

No man is born wise, and most men remain otherwise until they are dead.

EVERY husband thinks he can tame a shrew except the poor fellow that has her.

ENCOURAGING.—Census returns show that man works more and woman less than they did ten years ago. It is true that in a good many directions more and more women find employment—many more are teachers and clerks, for instance—but the great decrease in the number of domestic servants brings down the general percentage.

AN INTELLIGENT MONKEY.—M. Hachet-Souffier tells the following story of intelligence in a monkey: "Recently," he says, "I compelled a monkey to go for sweets to a box, the cover of which was ornamented inside with a mirror. Not only did the animal discover that the glass reflected his own image, but after a few days he used the mirror as a dandy would. One day a bit of liquid plaster fell on his face and immediately hardened. The monkey ran to the box, opened it, and used the mirror to scratch away the plaster."

ONLY AN ELECTRIC SHOCK.—Everybody has experienced the queer little shiver that comes upon one now and then without apparent cause. It is generally put down as "some one walking over my grave." Actually we are told it is the effect of electricity. This great power is constantly being generated everywhere, and when the positive and negative parts of the power meet, they produce a shock on any living thing. There is a good deal of electricity in the air, and when the human body is made a meeting point the sensation is liable to be felt about the region of the spine. Some people are liable to shocks now and then in special parts of them, in the ankle for instance, or very commonly around the base of the brain. There is no harm in it, but it shows a rather highly-strung organisation.

RESPECTING A LANGUAGE.—In no other country is literature so revered as it is in China. A printed word is regarded almost as a sacred thing, and this sometimes leads to amusing incidents when a Chinese teacher is dealing with a bristly American pupil. This returned traveller spent four hours a day while in China with a native teacher of the language, and one day, as the two young men were starting on a walk together, and the American was about to put on a new pair of shoes, he heard a horrified exclamation from the Chinaman. "You not put foot on words!" he gasped, pointing to the name and size marked inside the shoe; and it was a long time before he recovered from his amazement that anyone could be so lacking in proper respect as to treat the symbols of his own language or any other in such a way.

A DEMAND FOR WIVES.—The crying need of South Africa is more white women. Before the war the shortage was 69,000, and now the disproportion must be much greater. It means that about one man in every four of the British in South Africa could never hope to find a white wife, whether Dutch or English, in the country before the war. Now that hostilities are over there will be a renewed influx of men to the mining centres, and an army of occupation must be maintained in the country; but there is no probability of a natural and automatic increase in the number of women. Shortsighted optimists say, "Well, let the British marry Boer girls and bring about a fusion of the two races." Apart from the fact that there are not enough Boer women to "go round," it has been the invariable experience in South Africa that when a British man marries a Boer girl their children follow the mother and reinforce the Boer party. We do not want that. Nothing short of an immigration of 3,000 British women every year, carried on for a generation, can save the situation, and place Britain in a position of numerical equality with the Boers.

AN odd thing about boots and shoes: "They're always soled before you buy them."

A HUGE TOP.—Chinamen in Astoria, Oregon, amuse themselves with a huge top made out of an empty white lead keg. A square opening is cut in the side, and it takes three men to spin it, one to hold the top and two to pull the string with a stick, which sets it in motion. While spinning it sounds like the whistle of a steamer, and can be heard three blocks away.

WOOD TOO HARD TO BURN.—There are certain kinds of wood that are too hard to burn, or refuse to ignite for some other reason, such as ironwood and the good brier root, but it is a curiosity to come across a piece of common deal—the soft, light wood of which so many boxes are made—that cannot be set fire to. The piece of wood in question was common white deal from Sweden, but was remarkable for its comparative weight. It had formed part of a boat belonging to a whaler, and had been dragged below the surface of the water to the depth of more than half a mile by a harpooned whale. The length of line and the short distance from the point of descent after being struck at which the whale rose to the surface was a proof of the depth to which it had dragged the boat. Only part of the boat came up again at the end of the line, and it was taken on board when the whale had been killed. The piece of wood was so hard that it would not burn in a gas jet. The weight of water had compressed it.

WHY DON'T YOU GET A COACH?—Until about the last twenty years of the eighteenth century no self-respecting man dared appear in the streets carrying an umbrella. If any more venturesome man did so he was sure to be hailed by the mob as "a mincing Frenchman" and asked, "Frenchman, why don't you get a coach?" Much of this opposition to the general use of umbrellas originated with the chairmen and drivers of hackney coaches, who naturally regarded wet weather as a godsend, and viewed the parasol with dislike as being harmful to their trade. But it is useless to oppose the march of progress, and in time the umbrella began to rise steadily to its present position. Umbrellas and sunshades used to be carried in a way the reverse of the present fashion, or, as we should say, upside down. They had a ring at the top by which they could be held on the finger and hung up in the house; the wooden handle terminated in a rounded point, to rest on the ground. To-day the umbrella is ubiquitous. In summer no lady considers her costume complete without the finishing touch of a dainty parasol, while to men the umbrella has become one of the necessities of daily life.

A CURE FOR STAGE FRIGHT.—It was graduating night for the piano class, and the pupils of the Conservatory were very much excited. All were nervous, some on the verge of tears. "Fie! fie!" exclaimed the elocution teacher, as she entered the room. "What do you mean by all this nonsense? I have a remedy in my room that will set you right in a moment. I will give each of you a dose just before you are ready to play, but you must each promise not to tell others what it is. As each pupil emerged smiling from the elocution teacher's rooms, went on the platform, and came back, saying, "I never felt the least bit frightened," great curiosity was expressed as to what this wonderful remedy could be. It was very simple—she only slapped their backs. She began by patting their backs and shoulders with the palm of her hands, alternating right and left. The slaps grew faster and harder, until the poor victim could scarcely bear it; yet as the blood went tingling through the veins there was such an exhilarating effect that each one felt impelled to endure "just a little more" until the teacher sent them off laughing to the delightful task of playing their graduating piece, which all of them did with honour to themselves and to their teachers.

CLOVER IN NEW ZEALAND.—Red clover could not be successfully grown in New Zealand until bumblebees were imported and acclimated. These insects, by fertilising the flowers through moving from one to another, have changed the island from an annual importer of red clover seed to a large and increasing producer and exporter, thus opening a new and valuable source of wealth to the colony.

HOW NEEDLES ARE MADE.—It may surprise a good many to learn that no fewer than twenty-two separate processes are required to make the tiny steel instrument familiar to everyone, but the fact gives one an idea of the perfection to which its manufacture has been brought. A needle is shown of the time of Queen Victoria's accession in the factory, and a comparison of the one made to-day shows what strides the industry has made even in one reign, and what patience and inventiveness have been brought to bear upon it. A thick, badly shaped shaft, white in colour, with an irregular point, a head much larger than the body of the object, and a roughly-drilled circular eye; such was the needle with which the seamstress of 1837 had to sew. The modern needle is fine, with an evenly tapered point, a head no wider than the shaft, an eye perfectly smooth inside and well shaped, and a polish like glass, so that it slips easily through the material sewn. To understand to what a pitch of perfection needle-making has been brought, one has only to examine the "caly-eyed" needle, one of the latest developments of the article. As it is threaded through a slit in the top of the head, instead of in the ordinary way, there must be sufficient elasticity to allow the thread to pass into the eye without being frayed or cut, and at the same time the sides of the head must be capable of springing together again so as to prevent the cotton from slipping out after the needle is threaded. It is evident that to ensure this elasticity the needle must be tempered with the greatest regularity; and extreme care has to be taken to make the sides of the slit perfectly smooth, so that the thread will not be cut whilst passing through it.

ALL FOR GLORY.—On the subject of the terrible risks workmen frequently take to show their courage and win the admiration of their fellows, a bridge contractor recalled the following incident:—I remember when working at the big bridge across the Niagara, when the two cantilever arms had approached within fifty feet of each other, a keen rivalry as to who should be the first to cross sprang up among the men. A long plank connected the two arms, leaving about two and a-half feet of support at each end. Strict orders were issued that no one should attempt to cross the plank upon penalty of instant dismissal. At the noon hour I suddenly heard a great shout from the men, who were all starting up. Raising my eyes, I saw a man step on the end of that plank, stop a minute, and look down into the whirlpool below. I knew he was going to cross, and I shouted to him, but he was too high up to hear. Deliberately he walked out until he reached the middle of the plank. It sagged down with his own weight until I could see light between the two short supporting ends and the cantilevers on which they rested. He saw the end in front of him do this, hesitated, and looked back to see how the other end was. I thought he was going to turn. He stopped, grasped both edges of the plank with his hands, and, throwing his feet up, stood on his head, kicking his legs in the air, cracking his heels together, and yelling to the terrified onlookers. This he did for about a minute—it seemed to me like forty. Then he let his feet drop down, stood up, waved his hat, and trotted along the plank to the other side, slid down one of the braces hand over hand, and regained the ground. We discharged him, of course, but what did he care? He got all the glory, his fellows envied him, and he could command work anywhere.

Facetiae

It is one of the curiosities of natural history that a horse enjoys his food most when he hasn't a bit in his mouth.

ALGERNON: "Tommy, do you think your sister would marry me?" Tommy: "Yes, she'd marry almost anybody from what she said to me."

POULTERER: "Why did you return that pair of fowls yesterday?" Customer: "Because I thought you had better send them to a home for aged couples."

"I wish you would pay a little attention to what I am saying, sir!" roared a lawyer at an exasperating witness. "I am paying as little as I can," was the calm reply.

THE ELDER'S WIFE: "Where did you get all those rare coins, little boy?" Little Boy: "Father gave them to me. He is the man who hands around the collection basket every Sunday."

COMPROMISE.—Boroughs: "Say, old man, lend me five pounds till the first of the month, will you?" Markley: "Well—er—I'll compromise with you. I'll lend you five shillings till the twentieth."

WEEKS: "I'll wager a new hat that man over there's a schoolmaster." Potts: "Non-sense, how do you know?" Weeks: "Oh, he tried his hand on the seat of the chair before he sat down on it!"

An eccentric divine once said to his audience, "My hearers, there is a great deal of ordinary work to be done in this world; and, thank the Lord, there are a great many ordinary people to do it."

MR. SILBERSTEIN (on whom the sheriff is levying): "Mein gracious! can't I hev a leedle more time, mein fren't?" The Sheriff: "Not by a blamed sight! This is one of them executions by lectricity you've read of."

"Ah, my lady, if I were to ask you for your heart and hand, do you think you would say 'no'?" "I'm sure I wouldn't, because even as a little girl I was taught that to answer questions with a plain 'no' was very unmanly indeed."

MAMMA: "Um—eh—my dear. This young man who is calling on you so constantly—do you think he has any intentions?" Mamma: "He doesn't know whether he has or not. I am the only one whose intentions are going to cut any figure in this deal."

NERVOUS WIFE (starting up in bed at midnight): "George, for mercy's sake wake up; I believe there is somebody in that empty room upstairs." Indignant Man of the House: "Well, of all the illogical women I ever knew you are the worst! If you can believe that you'll believe anything. You are cut out for a Theosophist."

PAPA (severely): "Did you ask mamma if you could have that apple?" Six-Year-Old: "Yes, sir." Papa: "Be careful, now. I'll ask mamma, and if she says you didn't ask her I'll whip you for telling a story. Did you ask mamma?" Six-Year-Old: "Truly, papa, I asked her." (A pause.) "She said I couldn't have it."

An Irishman, in describing America, said: "I am told that you might roll England thru it, an' it wouldn't make a dint in the ground; there's fresh-water oceans inside that ye might drown old Ireland in; and, as for Scotland, ye might stick it in a corner, and ye'd never be able to find it out except it might be by the smell o' whisky."

"What do you suppose Thompson did when the flat he lives in caught afire the other day?" "Sent in an alarm!" "No; he became wildly excited, apparently, and threw his wife's pug out of the third-storey window. Killed the brute, of course; and now she is wondering if Thompson didn't know just what he was doing all the time."

A SCIENTIFIC exchange states on authority that two bodies cannot come together without losing some of their energy. How about a man and a tack?

"I UNDERSTAND, Marie, that you broke your engagement with Mr. Earthleigh." "Oh, no, I didn't, dear. It just came apart, don't you know, after the season closed."

MAGISTRATE (surveying the prisoner): "Ah, a plain drunk, I see!" Prisoner (with dignity): "No-shir; fancy drunk, shir. Had no shing but champagne, shir."

A BOSTON clergyman, in an evidently hastily written advertisement, asks for "A young man to take charge of a span of horses of a religious turn of mind."

"WHAT is it, do you suppose, that keeps the moon in its place and prevents it from falling?" asked Araminta. "I think it must be the beams," said Charley, softly.

WALKER: "Did you hear about Smith having an eye removed?" Talker: "No. Good heavens! How did it happen?" Walker: "By changing his name to Smythe."

MISS FITZ-ALLEN: "Captain, what is the difference between 'dog-watch' at sea and canine vigilance ashore?" Captain: "One is four hours and the other is all night."

"PRESERVE order, please!" shouted a man on the platform to a restless audience. "There's no chance for preserves here!" a man yelled back. "There's too much jam."

GENTLEMAN (calling at the house of a friend): "Is your mistress in?" Mary: "She is, sir." Gentleman: "Is she engaged?" Mary: "Faith, she's more than that—she's married."

EXPLAINED.—Mrs. Youngbride: "How is it that you charge a cent a quart more than the other milkmen?" Waterpots: "Madam, you must remember that all my milk is hand-milked. That, of course, makes the price a little higher."

"DEAR me, I hope it ain't serious?" said old Mrs. Bunker. "What's the matter?" "Ethel says in her letter that she and her husband had a row on the lake Saturday afternoon." "Pooh! that ain't r-o-w row; it's r-o-o row."

TEACHER: "Explain the difference between law and custom." Boy (who owns a sailboat): "Accordin' to law, a steamboat must give the right of way to a sailboat; but 'cording to custom the sailboat has got ter make tracks or get smashed."

ETHEL: "Engaged? You dear, darling old thing. And never to tell me you had a beau. Who is it?" Maud: "George; I mean Mr. Jilby." "Ah, well, I am not surprised; he told me when I refused him he had nearly got to the end of his tether."

FENDERSON: "Had awfully hard luck this evening. Tried with all my might to say something agreeable; so I just bid them good-night and went home." Fogg: "And so you did succeed in saying something agreeable at last? I congratulate you, my boy."

"BUT, Tom, dear, where is the big trout you said you caught." "Oh, that one! Why—yes, of course—well, I took that trout and it looked so good I cooked it and ate it on the spot. And, speaking of eating, Maude, I wish you'd hurry up that dinner, I haven't had a mouthful all day." And then Maude for the first time doubted her husband's veracity.

"WHAT a lovely face Mrs. Augur has in repose—perfectly beautiful! Don't you think so?" said an enthusiastic young man to a grave old gentleman, who replied: "I can't say; I never saw her face in repose." "Indeed!" exclaimed the young man. "Then you are not intimately acquainted with the lady?" "N-o-o; I'm her husband," said the grave old gentleman.

LANDLADY: "Mr. Poorfellow, you haven't made your last payment." Boarder: "Yes, I have, madam. I never expect to be able to make another."

TOO STRONG A RESEMBLANCE.—Photographer: "Now try to look like yourself." (Noting the effect): "Well, er, h-m; try to look like somebody else."

"He is an ungentlemanly fellow. When he rescued me from drowning last summer he hugged me, and I'd never met him before." "You wrong him, Ethel. He was only wringing you out."

ETIQUETTE.—In sending invitations to a wedding or party to a family with unmarried daughters, there is no need of separate cards for the daughters. Address envelope "Mr. and Mrs. Blank and family."

"I SHALL now give you the effect of distance," he said to her, and he sang so low as to be scarcely heard. "A little further, please," she said, cruelly; and he picked up his voice and went away with it into the chilly night.

JUDGE: "If you know of any mitigating circumstance you are at liberty to state it. Prisoner: "I don't know of any except that I took to stealing because I didn't want to loaf around the street corners and be taken for a detective."

A THOUGHTFUL man says: "Why should the beehive be taken as a symbol of industry? Not a bee is to be seen all winter long, while the cockroach is up at five in the morning, and never goes to bed till midnight. Let's change this thing."

"I SEE," said a man, entering a caterer's establishment, "that you advertise 'weddings furnished.'" "Yes, sir," replied the caterer, briskly. "I wish you'd send a couple to my house right away. I've two daughters I'd like to get off my hands."

BILKINS: "Bothered by a piano next door, eh? Well, I have a dog which always howls when my wife plays the piano—howls so she has to stop; and I'd let you have him if it wasn't for one thing." Willems: "Is he cross?" Bilkins: "No, I can't spare him."

"Mr son, stop. You must not dispute your mother that way." Boy: "But she's in the wrong." Father: "That makes no difference; and you might as well learn, my child, once for all, that when a lady says a thing is so, it is so;" and then he added earnestly, "even if it isn't so."

GREAT BELLE (four seasons): "I presume you are going to Miss Tiptop's outing party?" Rival belle (first season): "N—o, I wasn't invited." Great Belle (maliciously): "Indeed! How very strange! I am going." Rival Belle: "Yes, I heard they had finally secured a chaperon."

He (five years after): "All this gush about love is extremely stupid; where did the book come from, anyhow? I must say the person who selected it showed a very insipid taste." She (quietly): "It's the book you gave me during our honeymoon, John; we read it eleven times the first week we had it." (Prolonged silence.)

They had been talking about their neighbours all the evening, and there being a lull in the conversation, one of the party said: "Suppose we now talk about ourselves and rip up each other's character a little!" "That is unnecessary," replied a thin-faced, thin-tipped lady; "our neighbours are probably doing that for us."

"HAVE you a stylish young girl you could recommend me?" said a gentleman in an employment office. "Excuse me, sir," replied the affable manager, "but do you live in the corner house?" "Yes. Why do you ask?" "Because your wife was here only a moment ago to see if we had a tow-headed girl with a wart on her nose."

A DESPERATE DEED

SUMMARY OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

Harold, Earl of Silverdale, is spending the Christmas holidays at Woodville Honour. His host, Sir Stuart Woodville, has twin daughters, Lillian and Marguerite, who bear such a striking resemblance to each other that a stranger finds it extremely difficult to distinguish between them. Marguerite has already a dark page in her young life; while Lillian has given her maiden confidence and love to the Earl, and a marriage is speedily arranged. The Earl and Countess of Silverdale are returning from their honeymoon, and, while staying in London for a few days, a telegram reaches the Earl, stating that his daughter Iva, by his first wife, has been injured in a fire. The Earl at once leaves for Belgium. During his absence Lillian agrees with Marguerite to return quietly to their Sussex home. They are detained on the way owing to an accident. Lillian is mistaken a second time for Marguerite by the man who holds her sister's secret. This person had followed Lillian to her room at the hotel, and she, terrified at his threats, is powerless to say a word, when he fires, and she falls lifeless. Marguerite, finding the body a little later, takes in the situation at a glance, and determines that she, Marguerite Woodville, is dead, and that Lillian, Countess of Silverdale, still lives.

CHAPTER IX.

NOVEMBER! Such a night as it was! clear, cool, crisp, delicious! A sky as darkly blue as polished steel, up which a silvery moon went drifting—the "fretted fire of many stars"—a faint breeze, which seemed to hold all the flower-scents of the dead summer in its frosty sweetness.

The little town of Rothlyn was brilliantly illuminated. From the poorest hovels to the richest residences lights glimmered at every pane. Bonfires blazed in the streets; in all the glory of new uniforms and brass instruments, the local band paraded the streets.

For to-night was not the Earl of Silverdale to bring home his bride?

Like a painted palace, like the vision of a dream, like the magic mansion of Aladdin, the old castle looked that night.

In the green heart of a Sussex woodland it stood, imposing, magnificent. On gently-rising land, it commanded an extensive and beautiful view.

Built in the days of Elizabeth, it had been enlarged, improved, till in its majestic beauty was represented the varying style and splendour of several centuries. Turreted battlement, the oldest part densely covered with ivy; here a French window, there a porticoed entrance, yonder a curiously-balustraded casement, it presented an oddly distinguished appearance.

Silverdale Castle? At once a palace of pleasure and a veritable stronghold. With its smooth, green terraces, its vast dusky park, where the sun's sharpest lances could scarcely pierce the shield upheld by copper-beech and oak and cedar; its velvet hollows, where the red deer crouched; its huge fountain, leaping like a gush of diamonds from old Neptune's swarthy throat; its orchid houses, its conservatories, its fantastic pagodas and pavilions; its glowing rosery; its cool, silver, shimmering lake; its vistas of bloom and "ways that wind into woody dells"; and, not least, its splendid home, rich with the accumulated treasures—the memories, the associations, the refinement and the luxury of centuries—all combined to make it the show-place of the county and the desire of nomadic plutocrats.

But just now came fame from the great demesne no song of nightingale or thrush; still was the voice of the fountain.

And Silverdale Castle looked, as has been said, a palace of enchantment, for it was one blaze of light from cellar to garret.

From the gothic windows of stained glass which flanked the oaken doors streamed prismatic radiance, sapphire and rose and gold. Here and there curtains of plush and lace,

thrust back, gave glimpses of royal fires, leaping in burnished grates.

And within were flowers and lights and warmth and luxury and fragrance, and an expectant silence.

Restlessly, up and down the great drawing-room walked the daughter of the Earl of Silverdale.

She was coming—her stepmother. How strangely it sounded! And hardly older than herself. Would she love her? Ah, surely she must! That letter to her was all that was tender and good. And the face in the photograph her father had sent her was appealing, and frank and sweet.

Was that the train? A whistle—yes; and a bell ringing—they were slowing into the station. And now faintly into her ears came from the village the roar of many voices—the sound of distant cheering.

A reception in the usual sense the Countess had distinctly declined. No one must be at the Castle to welcome her except Iva. Her loss was too recent; she could not bear any social excitement, she said.

And, indeed, since the September morning when her sister was laid in the little cemetery of the Honour, and she had fallen stiff and senseless when the first shovelful of clay clattered down on the coffin-lid, she had been far from strong.

The Earl had immediately taken her abroad, but lately he had written she was longing for England, so he was bringing her home.

And so, though no celebration at the Castle was to mark the advent of its mistress, the townspeople lighted their windows and set their tar-barrels blazing, and made music to the best of their ability, and clapped their hands sore, and cheered themselves hoarse, for the Earl was a good landlord and a generous one, and they all honoured him.

Leaning against an ebony pedestal, her head on her hand, Iva stood and listened to the dull clamour which drifted up from below.

And she did not know what a lovely picture she made standing there. She wore a soft, silky, greenish gown, which was almost black, in fact. Simple and clinging, it outlined charmingly the erect young figure.

The square corsage was edged with f'my lace, but nothing—not even a thread of gold—marred the velvet snowiness of throat and bosom.

The thick, shiny hair was wound coronet-wise over the proud, pretty head, and just above, but not concealing the pure forehead, clustered sunny ringlets.

And the face, that was so childish, and yet so subtly noble—the face, with its slim, dark brows and wonderful violet eyes, and dimples which came and went in the most bewildering fashion—and beautiful rose-red, rose-wet mouth—ah, it was a face to love, to live for to die for!

And not merely because of its fairness—many women are fair. Rather because one saw something in it—truth, courage, tenderness, loyalty—which? or all? Whatever it was, one trusted her, seeing it, revered and loved her.

Listen! Carriage-wheels. She started—moved forward. She crossed the drawing-room. The iron-clamped doors had been flung wide as she reached the hall.

She went through—out on the broad upper step. And so, standing in the flooding light like the spirit of welcome personified, the alighting travellers looked up and saw her.

"My dear Iva!" her father said.

And then he had her in his arms, and was kissing her warmly.

Gently and quickly she released herself, turning to the little dark figure beside him. She waited for no words of introduction, but bent her golden head till her lips touched those of her step-mother.

"Welcome home! Are you very tired?" cried the musical young voice. "Oh, you must be! You shall go to your room at once, and then we will have dinner. Don't call your maid. Let me go with you, mamma."

The Earl, busy greeting old domestics, turned to shoot her a swift, grateful glance, and something for just a moment made the black lashes of the Countess of Silverdale glittering and wet.

"You are thinner and—graver than I thought you would be, judging by your picture," Iva said, as the servants having curtained their welcome to the new lady, she and her stepmother went up the grand stairway together.

"My picture?"

"Yes. Papa sent it to me."

They had reached the suite designed for the Countess—half-a-dozen splendid apartments, all furnished in soft wood tints. She turned on the threshold.

"Why, I have had no picture taken since I was a child."

"Oh, you forget! I have his letter in my pocket. See, here it is!"

She held her the picture.

In the velvet-hung, Persian-rugged, brilliantly-lighted corridor she stood and looked at it, and an expression which was actually one of fear came into her face.

For the laughing eyes looking up into hers were those of her once happy sister—the same which had stared at her, glassy and blind, just two months ago.

Her hands shook as she returned it; but her lips were smiling.

"I had forgotten. It was taken when I went to London, almost two years ago. It makes one shudder and feel old to see an unremembered picture of oneself."

And then she gave a little cry of pleasure.

"Oh, how beautiful!"

For she was in her boudoir now—the luxurious, artistic room which was to be her own particular nest.

The curtains and portières of ruby plush, the mossy carpet, the open ebony piano, the cheerful fire, the good pictures, the easels, the puffy chairs, the cushion-piled lounge, the books, the lights, the flowers—she had never seen anything like it before—anything half so rich, so cozy, so elegant!

"You are looking quite yourself again, Iva," the Earl said, when, an hour later, they sat at dinner.

She laughed.

"Am I? Well, I wonder my hair isn't white with the horror of that awful night."

And then she went on to speak of it to the lady who sat for the first time at the head of the table, of which she henceforth would be hostess.

She was strongly affected by circumstances. A rainy day gave her the blues. A bit of sunshine cheered her. And now, in this splendid old room, presiding over a superbly-appointed table, the viands delicious, the champagne unrivalled, her spirits rose amazingly.

And bewitching and sparkling she looked too, though she was of course all in black—the richest of surah, the finest of Spanish lace.

"By-the-way, Iva," the Earl said, suddenly, looking up from his bird, "whom do you suppose I met in Calais?"

She shook her head smilingly.

"Geoffrey Damyn."

What name was that? Had she heard aright?

Instantly out of the glowing face of the Countess fled all its laughter.

"Yes, I remember him. Sir Geoffrey now, is he not? Did he know you were married?"

His lordship burst out laughing.

"My dear child, I can't tell you. I took it for granted he knew, so did not mention the



"IT'S ABOUT THE CHILD I WANT TO SPEAK," SAID REUBEN GARRATT, "I REFUSE TO PAY FOR ITS KEEP ANY LONGER."

fact. He was rushing for his boat, so we had not much time for conversation."

How it crept over Marguerite (a thousand pardons! the Countess of Silverdale)—that queer, icy sensation!

If they only would not look at her!

"I asked him to come and pay us a good long visit. He promised to spend Christmas with us. A little wild he always was, but a capital fellow for all that."

Coming here—he! Of all men living, that he should come under her roof! And even if she succeeded in deceiving him, as she had all the rest, if he fell in love with Iva's fresh, young loveliness—what then? What could she say or do? And oh, the horror of meeting him at all hours, smiling back at him, exchanging social nothings with him, and all the time knowing what she did.

She must not faint, she told herself fiercely.

She tried to raise her champagne-glass to her lips. With a musical clink-clink it fell broken on her plate.

"Papa!"

Iva had started up.

"Lillian, my love!"

She was smiling brightly, though her face was very white.

"A slight faintness, the fatigue of travel; that is very wearing, you know."

And all the time she was thinking she could not fight it out. The odds were too heavy against her. And yet she dare not yield.

Good heavens! why had she not died instead of Lillian? But she had died. Yes, she must remember that. It was Marguerite who was dead—poor Marguerite!

A knock.

"May I come in?"

"Come," cried the Countess.

Into the dainty boudoir of ruby and dull gold came Lady Iva. She was dressed for walking—dark blue cloth dress, double-breasted

astrachan jacket, and pretty bewinged round hat.

"I thought I would look in and tell you I am going out. I would like to see how poor old Granny Morris is getting along."

The Countess, lounging by the hearth, looked up and laughed.

"And who is Granny Morris?"

"Don't you know?" rubbing on her kid gloves as she spoke. "She is my old nurse. She lives on the demesne. In fact, she keeps one of the lodges. Papa is very kind to her because I am so fond of her."

"Ah, yes! You will find it chilly."

"Oh, no! I walk so fast. Au revoir, mamma!"

And then she was off and away, leaving her stepmother deep in negligé, slippers and novel by the crackling fire.

Such a splendid day!—a hint of frost in the air. The trees were donning their winter garments, dead leaves drifted under foot, but the sky was brilliantly blue, the air keen and bracing—a day on which it was good just to live and breathe.

For quite an hour the Earl's daughter lingered in the little low-ceiled lodge parlour and talked to the querulous old woman who sat knitting there.

"I hear we've got a grand new mistress up at the Castle, miss?" she questioned, grimly.

"Yes. She is just as sweet as she is lovely, too. She will be more like a sister than a stepmother to me. Oh, who is that?"

For the figure of which she had caught sight through the diamond-latticed window was vaguely familiar. The old woman rose hastily, looked out.

She instantly dropped her knitting and rushed to the door.

"Oh, Master Lionel!" Lady Iva heard her cry.

The young fellow, walking slowly by on the road without, looked back smilingly at the shrill summons, and, turning aside, unlatched one

of the smaller iron gates, came through and up the trim walk to the door at which stood Grannie Morris.

"My dear laddie! and I didn't know you were home! And were you passing without coming in to see your old nurse?"

His cheery laugh reached the girl within.

"Oh, I thought it was your tea-time and I must not disturb you!" he declared, shaking her skinny old hand vigorously.

"Come in—come in!" turning to light a candle which stood on a little table in the small hall. "And now let me have a good look at you."

The dusk was closing in, already in this little room it was quite dark.

"Why, laddie, you've been sick!" She was holding her candle above her grey head, and looking searchingly at him, in her excitement wholly forgetful of her other guest, who sat silent and surprised in the shadow. "You are white as a slip of a girl. And why have you your beautiful curly hair cut off so close? Dear me, laddie, now I look right hard at you, I can hardly think it's you!"

He was a handsome fellow, splendidly tall and well-proportioned, with a bright, dashing, clean-shaven face, short dark hair, finely-chiselled features, straight nose, square chin, firm mouth, and a pair of laughing quizzical eyes.

"I have been ill. I met with an accident which kept me on my back a few weeks. I was in a burning building. Coming from it the ladder I was descending broke. I got considerably shaken up and scorched—so much so that when they showed me a mirror I looked in it, and wondered, like the old woman in children's story books, 'If I be I?' So I said to myself, just as she did:—

"Well, if I be I,
As I suppose I be,
I've a good nurse at home,
And she'll know me!"

And behold! I have hurried back for you to identify me!"

Her wrinkled face relaxed.

"Oh, go 'long with you now, Mr. Lionel! You are just as great a tease as ever, I do—Well, if I wasn't forgetting!" wheeling sharply round to where Iva sat. "My dearie, won't you please forgive me?"

The girl rose, pulling on her gloves. "Certainly! And I must thank you for calling Mr. Lionel."

The young fellow was staring at her half-incredulously.

"Is it—" he began.

She held out her pretty, slender hand with a graceful cordiality.

"Yes, I am Iva Romaine. And this is the first opportunity I've had to thank you for your heroism that terrible night. I do thank you now."

The tone said much more than the words, so earnest it was so tremulous.

For all at once, with appalling vividness, had come back to her that moment when she stood in the high convent window, in the smoke, the flame, the glare—stood looking down on the surging crowd below and waited for death.

And then up the ladder had sprung a stalwart young figure, in gay masquerade ball costume of rose and white satin, all glittering with jewels, and into hers had looked a brave, boyish face, with resolute lips and dauntless eyes—the face which for the second time she beheld in the little candle-lit room of the lodge at her father's gate.

When they came out into the sweet, still November evening, he turned and walked beside her up the avenue.

"You are our neighbour, I think papa said. I have been in Sussex so little, I am unfamiliar with its palaces."

"Yes, our land joins. I have not been home myself very much for several years. I really live in London; but I like to retain the servants and keep the old place ready for occupancy at a moment's notice."

"Then you are alone?"

"Unluckily yes. I have no near relations, no family ties, and so I knock here and there as the humour takes me. Ah, one of your maids has an admirer, I perceive."

Iva glanced carelessly at the two people standing in the shade of a tree just beyond them, and talking earnestly.

The woman was small and slender, the man of unusual height.

It was bright enough for her to notice that he was roughly dressed.

So absorbed were they in their conversation they did not appear to hear the footsteps of the pair approaching.

They were almost upon them when the woman became cognisant of their presence.

She turned sharply; as quickly turned away. Just one glance!

"The Braceborough ball comes off next month, I believe," Lionel was saying. "May we hope—I am a member of the club, you know—that you and the Countess will honour us by your presence?"

She hardly heard him.

"No—that is, yes. We have not really decided yet. Will you not come, in?"—for they had crossed the terrace and were at the foot of the shallow stone steps.

"Thank you, no; but I shall call to-morrow if I may."

And then he lifted his hat and walked away.

Iva stood still a moment, then she went in across the rich, lofty, beautiful old hall and up to her own room.

She felt strangely ill at ease and bewildered; for the face which had been turned to her a moment in the waning light, and so suddenly and significantly averted—the face of the woman who talked with a menial at dusk in

her father's demesne—was that of her step-mother, the Countess of Silverdale!

CHAPTER X.

On the part of the Countess the meeting had been purely accidental.

Wearily of the drowsy quietude of her room, the dulness of her novel, she had decided to walk down towards the lodge, meet Iva, and return with her.

And ten minutes after her resolution was taken she was out, and walking briskly down the wide, curving avenue.

Suddenly she stopped. She had seen no one, she had not heard a sound; but by some mesmeristic intuition she became conscious of an antagonistic presence.

Involuntarily she looked to the right. Standing under a copper-beech was a tall figure in black coat, dark trousers, and bowler hat. The knit brows, the beak-like nose, she recognised him immediately.

She recoiled a step. He saw the action, and laughed as he strode towards her.

"Oh, you needn't be scared"—with reassuring insolence—"though you did serve me a mean trick the last time I saw you—getting your high-and-mighty husband to kick me out-of-doors. Well, I'm not drunk now; and this time you must hear me out."

She glanced around helplessly. No one was in sight, and his dark face was threatening as a thundercloud, and set as a bulldog's.

"Well, hurry!"

If she must, she must listen then. The pretty teeth under the rosy lips shut with an angry snap.

"It's about the child I want to speak. I refuse to pay for its support any longer."

"Ah, the child! But you said it was dead."

He smiled.

"So she told you that, did she? Well, she was pretty confidential. I didn't think she was the kind to blab. Yes, I said it was dead, but I don't see how the fact of my saying so proves it."

"You lied, then?" she hissed, between her teeth.

"Yes, your ladyship," with cheerful promptness. "I lied—straight! For why? Oh, I thought it would be a good thing to have a hold over her of which she knew nothing—a rod in pickle, as the saying goes—and through it I intended to get even with her some time for the way she trampled on me. I suppose she told you about that, too?" he wound up, fiercely.

"Yes, yes! no matter now. The child really lives, you swear?"

"Yes, if you can call it living. It is in a dirty little hole of a house in a pretty rough corner of London. There are a good many cats around, and a good many rats, and just about as many dirty, hungry young ones. You can't hardly call it living."

"Don't!" she protested, faintly.

She was uncertain whether to be glad or sorry her child lived. It would be another obstacle, another secret, another anxiety. But then how soft the little head which for a few short days had cuddled on her breast, how tender the touch of the tiny hands!

But in that place, among such people, things—it was terrible to think of.

"By jingo!" with a gruff laugh; "you're as squeamish over it as if it was your own. And you do look like her. The Lord never made a couple of ivy-leaves more alike than you two. You might be her, you—"

"Go on!" she cried, feverishly. "The child!"

He folded his arms.

"That's for you to say. I've been skulking around here these couple of days waiting to ask you that identical question. I didn't dare go to the house. I've had all I want of your fire-eater."

What would she do? what could she? She might bring the little one down here, declare him some child taken through charity, have

him well cared for. But—And the doubt was a shock. What if this latest yarn was only another diabolical falsehood?

She looked straight up at him.

"How am I to know if I interest myself in this affair but that you are palming off some strange child on me? How am I to know? I can't believe you," with quiet contempt.

His snaky eyes twinkled. His moustache curled up at the corners.

"You needn't. You can believe your own eyes."

A resemblance. She had not thought of that. She shrank back a step.

"He is like—" she faltered.

"Like him—yes."

Dusk was creeping through the trees. Chilly grew the air.

"I can't stand here all night," she declared, impatiently. "Tell me what you want—what you are willing to do?"

"Now, that's business—that's what I like to hear," he commented, placidly. "Well, here's my terms: I'll give you the kid's address—it is written on this card—and you can do as you like about him. I wash my hands of him. She is dead, and so I've no more use for him. I've enlisted, I got my shilling a day; but, bless you, what's that? So, if I give you this card (I won't, you know, unless you agree to what I ask—I'll let the youngster die of dirt and starvation first), if I give you this card, and if I promise to keep my mouth shut now and for ever—and you needn't be scared much about that, for our regiment is going to Egypt soon, and there is less chance of a man coming back than of his staying there—will you give me a thousand pounds?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I have not got it."

"She did not have very much, either, but she gave me her jewellery, and I used to lumber it in London. Why, one night it was pouring rain—New Year's night, it was—and she came rushing through it all to me with a gold chain. She knew I must have something. What's the use of being smart enough to find out about things if you can't make some money out of them when you do find out?"

"Hush!"

Footsteps behind them, coming up the centre of the avenue.

Without considering what she was doing, she glanced around, and flashed her face away again.

But in that second she saw the passers by were Iva and some strange young gentleman.

"She was awfully afraid of being found out—most so after the Earl, your husband that is, came to the Honour."

"Oh, stop!" she commanded, in a perfect agony of nervousness. "Let me think. I can give you three hundred pounds."

"No go."

Could she possibly raise more? She racked her brain.

"Make it five," she urged.

Far away she could hear the sound of horse's hoofs. Perhaps it was the Earl returning.

"I can't," she panted.

"All right."

He began to put away the card he held.

Oh, the poor baby! to be left in that hideous place! The mighty mother instinct rose in all its power. She must get the money somehow. She held out her hand.

"You will make it five?"

She nodded.

Nearer came the sound of the trotting hoofs.

"When will I get it?"

"Friday night."

"Where?"

"Here!"

"You swear it?"

The hoof-beats sounded horribly distinct on the hard road.

"Yes—yes!"

The equestrian had turned in at the gates—was riding rapidly up the avenue.

She snatched the card—hid it in her bosom.

"I will pay you then—yes!" she whispered, savagely. "And I hope—I hope to Heaven you will go to Egypt and be shot down like a dog there, you scoundrel!"

She wheeled away—was standing in the middle of the avenue, hailing the horseman. He reined in.

"Why, Liliat, dear!"

"Yes," the man in the shadow of the copper-beech heard her cry, sweetly and merrily, "I came to meet you! Now you must dismount and walk up with me—think of my devotion!"

"It was good of you, love, but then, you are all goodness!"

"Of course," gaily.

And her silvery laughter floated back to him as they walked together up the avenue.

"Harold!"

"Yes, dear."

"I want to ask you a favour."

"Granted," he laughed, "be it half my kingdom!"

It would be hard to refuse her anything, he thought, as he leaned against the light oak mantel in her boudoir and looked down on the pretty, pleading face lifted to his.

"It is hardly as much as that, I think. I heard yesterday a sad little story. You must hear it before I make my request. May I tell it to you?"

"I can't say," quizzically, "that I am enthusiastic about sad little stories. But of course, love," as he saw her face darken, "I am only joking. Tell it to me."

They were going out to dinner, a fashionable affair given in her honour, and she was dressed for the occasion. Her trained dress of black velvet was a marvel of richness and simplicity. Against it the fair round throat and firm white arms gleamed marble white. Around her neck was a narrow band of velvet, from which depended a diamond star, a splendid heirloom of the Romaines.

Her face, thinner than of old, looked just now childishly youthful, for the soft cheeks were flushed with suppressed excitement, the grey eyes looked very large and anxious.

"You must sit down," she said.

He sank obediently into a big tempting chair by the hearth. He put out his hand, caught his wife's, and drew her down on his knee.

But she sprang up.

"No, no! I cannot sit still. I am too nervous."

He laughed.

"And so that is why I must keep quiet. I believe you just wish to give me an opportunity to admire your dress."

For she was walking away from him, the thick, blue-black folds of her gown trailing behind her. She flashed back a saucy smile at him.

"That is it precisely, sir."

She came back to the mantel, and stood there looking down on the bed of crimson coals in the grate.

"Well, it is about a girl who used to live at the Honour," she began, abruptly. "She was very young and quite pretty—as I remember her, a merry, thoughtless child, never in her waking hours without a song or a laugh or a gay word."

She paused. A dreamy, retrospective look had come into her eyes.

His lordship smothered a yawn.

"Yes," politely feigning interest, "a domestic?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Hardly. More a companion. Marguerite and she were inseparable."

"Ah!"

"And she went up to London to visit an aunt of hers. No one at the Honour ever saw her again!"

"What!" the Earl cried.

He was really startled. Her tone was so unconsciously tragic.

Lilian lifted her great shining eyes and looked across at him. She laughed reassuringly, perhaps a little too loudly.

"Oh, she came back, yes, but none ever saw her again as she used to be. A stranger might see no change. We all did. She who before had fairly floated, for she could scarcely keep her feet from dancing, walked wearily and slowly. She, whose laughter had been so ringing and spontaneous, rarely smiled. She had moods. She had grown sullen, excitable, capricious. All the innocence, the glad-heartedness, all the wild freshness of morning, had gone from her for ever."

She had spoken, slowly, deliberately, her eyes still gazing downwards as though reading in the fire the story she told.

"And why?"

He was not feigning interest now. He was leaning slightly forward, his elbow on the arm of his chair, his head on his hand.

"This was her story: In London, at her aunt's house, she had met a man—a frank, fine-looking fellow, a captain in a Calcutta regiment. It was a case of love at first sight. He was a captivating, manly, sunny-faced fellow, and she was pretty and impressionable. He was highly connected, but poor—in fact, in debt. She had money coming to her, dependent on her aunt's approval of the marriage."

"They dare not allow their attachment to become known. When he proposed a secret marriage she—very young and romantic, you must remember—thought it would be delightful in real life as in a novel. The mystery would be enchanting. How loyal her heart would be to him when 'lovers around her were sighing,' and how they would astonish everyone some day when he had succeeded to the heritage of his expectancy by saying, 'We have been married and faithful all these years!' And she dreamed of a cottage

Bowered in roses and covered with thatch

After the fun of a runaway match;

and all that sort of thing, you know—poor little fool!"

She was silent.

The Earl looked at her curiously. How much the relation of the story seemed to affect her! How tremendously in earnest she was!

Well, no wonder. She and this girl she spoke of had probably been dear friends and associates.

But he wished she would hurry. The carriage would soon be at the door.

"Well, she married him, in strictest privacy," the Countess resumed.

She left her place by the fire, came over to her husband's side, and sank down on a low stool beside him.

"She told her aunt she was going to visit a school friend, and she went away to a little, lonely, sea-coast town and lived six weeks with him. Then, fearing detection, she returned to her aunt's house. There, one morning, a man called to see her. It was her husband's servant. He had a box in his hands—a little box. He gave it to her. She opened it. Within were the few notes she had written him, her picture, a flower she had given him, and a ring of her hair. She could not speak. She was simply dazed. At last she faltered.

"My husband?"

"The fellow laughed insultingly.

"I guess you haven't got any. The captain gave me those traps to bring back to you. He's got dead lots of such stuff. He sailed for Calcutta yesterday. When he returns, in a couple of years, he's going to marry his cousin."

"And he mentioned her name—a rich and titled lady—Clotilde Rayne."

"She was crazy. But still she could not believe it. She could only say, stupidly:

"I was married!"

"And for answer the wretch before her joined his hands, rolled up his eyes, and said:

"Of course you were! And the minister wore a rig rented for the occasion at two-and-sixpence. And I was the minister!"

"She didn't die. No one ever does when they most long to. She did not even faint. She was afraid of her aunt appearing. She

got him to leave by promising to meet him in the park. She did so. He offered to marry her, clothing his proposals in words so insultingly condescending, it is a wonder her rage and scorn did not kill him! Then it was she came back to the Honour."

The Countess paused.

The Earl stooped, and put his arm around her.

"Why, my darling, how you are trembling! What a compassionate little creature you are, to be sure!"

"Yes," with a shaky laugh. "It is a hateful story! Let me tell you the rest—quickly! I hear the carriage coming around."

"Well, dear?"

He spoke soothingly, as he would to a child. He could feel her slight form quivering.

"Even there he followed her, and persecuted her. He threatened he would expose her. She gave him money, her little jewellery—ought of value she had. One April day she went to London. There her baby was born. Only yesterday I learned that she was dead."

Seven! It tinkled musically from the little malachite clock on the mantel.

They should be on their way. It was so abominably rude to keep dinner waiting.

He moved uneasily. She noticed the motion.

"And now," she cried, leaning forward and laying both her sparkling, clasped hands on his breast, "now my petition! I want to bring her little one down here, and have some good woman—Granny Morris, say—take care of him and love him. May I?"

He laughed, took her face between his palms, and kissed the hot cheek.

"Of course! What may you not do? My tender-hearted little Lilian!"

Ten minutes later, rolling away through the frosty, starlit night, he asked her, carelessly—

"When did that poor girl die?"

"And she answered—

"When Marguerite died—last September."

CHAPTER XI.

"Oh, relent, Lady Iva!"

But Lady Iva, looking at Lionel with sweet, remorseless eyes over her fire screen of peacock feathers, shook her golden head.

"I'm afraid there is no hope. Mamma's sister died so lately, she would not think of going."

"Going where, Iva?" queried a gay voice.

Down the wide, old stairs came floating a slim, little, dark-robed figure.

"We were talking of the Braceborough ball, mamma."

"And why should you not go, dear?"

"That is what I say, Lady Romaine," broke in the young fellow, exultant at having found an ally. "I'm sure a chaperon would be very easily secured."

"Of course. You certainly must go, Iva. Ah, here is Harold! We will appeal to him."

Without the winter night was closing in. Up from the hollow deer-park, the dusky shadows came shouldering each other. The brooding dusk was full of the prophecy of coming snow.

But here, in the magnificent baronial hall of the Romaines—a hall through which one might drive a coach-and-four, and which, however, gave one no idea of gauntness for all its lofty space—here was the warmth of a huge fire—here the rosy glow of Moorish lamps—here the luxurious, wavering light—here the rustle of silken gowns—here the murmurous sound of voices, "low with fashion, not-with feeling"—here, too, "elastic laughter sweet."

For though living in retirement, as was the Countess, because of her recent bereavement, already had the princely home over which she had come to preside resumed its rightful place as social authority and rendezvous.

"Such a dear little thing!" as Mrs. Trendworth said to the Dowager Duchess of Carlisle, when she happened to mention the new lady of the Castle—"such a dear, unassuming little thing! A perfect lady, I assure you; a

delightful acquisition. She comes of a very good family, too. It is a comfort to think she is a person we can know for her own sake. The Woodvilles have extremely blue blood in their veins, you know. And she is such an innocent child—not much older than his daughter!"

And so they all called on the dear little thing, and she charmed and flattered them with her youth and beauty and winning ways and uplifted grey eyes.

Soon it became an understood thing that those who were at the village, or out riding or driving, should drop in at Silverdale Castle about five o'clock.

Then were the ladies sure to be at home; then was the fire in the ribbed roof hall most ruddy; then of luxurious depth looked the rug-covered chairs and divans; then on the round table of carved and polished bog-oak, brightly glittered the silver tea service; then arose the fragrant steam of Pekoe and Sou-chong tea; then talk grew more rapid, laughter louder, mingling with both the dainty clink of rare old china.

It was all very delightful—the elegance, the æstheticism, the mild exhilaration, and informality.

Young Lionel got into the habit of coming in almost daily; the Dallas girls often walked over; Mrs. Trendworth could not resist "just looking in"; and the officers from the barracks, at Rothlyn, in braided fatigue uniforms and stiff caps, came riding up the avenue about the hour for kettledrum.

And just now there was quite a gay semicircle around the blazing fire. The talk had turned on the coming Christmas.

"We are going to be very quiet this year," Mary Dallas said. "There are only three or four old friends coming to us."

"Oh, I am going to have a houseful!" Mrs. Trendworth cried.

She was a widow, fat, fair, and fully fifty. She had strongly-marked features, grey hair, worn Pompadour, and a high colour. She dressed richly, entertained lavishly, enjoyed the society of young people, and held that a good laugh added a year to one's life.

"You always have," said Lionel.

"Who are they?" asked Jimmie Talbot.

He was a slender, brown-skinned, curly-headed and moustacheless young fellow.

She looked down on him as he lay stretched on the floor at the feet of Nora Dallas.

"Well, Guy Dairly is coming, and Priscilla Murray (only sixteen, and pretty as a picture Jimmie), and a German scientist, with an unpronounceable name, a friend of my brother's, and Sir Oswald Herold and Lady Clotilde Rayne, and—"

But the Countess of Silverdale heard no more. Not one word of the widow's cheery chatter reached her ear after that.

Lady Clotilde Rayne! It was the name—the very name.

Only once before had she heard it spoken; then it had burned into her heart and soul, and brain, with searing force.

"Oh, he has, gone sure enough! When he comes back he will marry his cousin. She is very wealthy, and dead struck on him. Her name is Lady Clotilde Rayne."

That most miserable day, that most wretched hour, when she had first heard that name spoken. How strange to hear it again! Now she was safe in the home of a good and honoured gentleman; now she was secure, respected, loved, happy, beyond calumny, and above reproach.

But once more she heard it.

And she, Lady Clotilde Rayne, was coming down to her neighbour's, and he, Sir Geoffrey Darny, to the glow of her own hearth and the shelter of her own roof-tree.

"Good heavens!" she murmured to herself, with a little weary sigh. What a small place the world is, anyway! We leave a person in Hong Kong and meet him in Hyde Park. A person—a ghost, rather—out of our dead and buried past sits down to dinner with us."

How she dreaded meeting him! He had never seen Lillian; his astonishment would be

overwhelming. She had told him of the marvellous likeness between herself and her sister. But in spite of all she knew how stunned he would be. And how would he act at first sight of her? As one dismayed? And what emotion would really sway him—remorse, fear of exposure, or only a reckless indifference?

"Dreaming?"

She started violently at the touch of her husband's hand on her shoulder.

"Yes," with a nervous laugh. "I really believe I was."

"And here is Jimmie, waiting to say goodbye."

She turned graciously to the young man, standing cap in hand, beside her chair.

"Yes. I said good-night twice, Lady Romaine, and you would not even look at me."

She rose, her piquant face bright and smiling.

"Indeed, I beg your pardon, Jimmie. You don't think I would purposely neglect you?"

The lad shook his curly head with wise deliberation.

"Perhaps not, and yet my heart misgives me!" he avowed with mock tragic emphasis.

"As I stood here, forgotten and alone, I said to myself, 'In her reverie you have no place,' said alas:

"I am only a poor poet made for singing at her casement,

Like the thrushes or the finches, while she thought of other things!"

"Bravo, Jimmie!" cried Ira's sweet, laughing voice.

They were all rising, going. Gay adieux were spoken, the massive doors opened, clanged.

A thought struck the Countess. It had thrilled her all day long. Just for the last hour and it slumbered.

She went swiftly upstairs to her own little nest of a dressing-room, and rang the bell.

She could never claim him, no. But she would do so much for him—would be so fond and careful of him. And if the Earl should come to love him, too, and perhaps some day adopt him!

The dream was bright.

Her maid appeared.

"I thought you would return this evening.

You brought the child?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"He is with Granny Morris?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"How did you find him? What were his surroundings?"

"Poor and dingy and dirty, my lady."

"Is he a fine child?"

"That he is—a bonnie little laddie. He doesn't look over-strong, but he has the loveliest black eyes one could see, and hair as golden as Lady Ira's own."

"Ah, that will do! You may go, Jane. I shall not need you for an hour yet."

The door closed. Her ladyship shivered in the downy depths of her chair. She drew her breath with a hard sob.

So he had told the truth! The resemblance must be very marked. Black eyes and yellow hair. It was the rare combination of the two which had made Sir Geoffrey Darny—plain Captain Darny—then—so handsome in her girlish eyes.

Would others remark it? Surely they must when the guest she dreaded came. Well, the boy would have to be kept quite away from the Castle while he remained. Not that the very faintest idea of the wild truth would ever enter his head, but others might remark the likeness, and it would be unpleasant for her.

As she sat by the fire, her jewelled hands clasped behind her dark head, her slippered feet crossed on the low brass fender, the folds of her dainty, tea-gown lying over the russet-rug in "a rippling sweep of satin," there came into her eyes a tenderness, a lovingness, a look of infinite longing.

"My own child!"

Her lips formed the words, though no sound escaped them. He was so near her; and she had thought him dead this year and more. Why, he must be able to say words now, put together little sweet, broken sentences. But there was one word he would not speak. And how, away down in her heart, she longed to hear it!

She sprang to her feet. She must see him before dinner; she would have time if she hurried.

She hastened to the wardrobe, caught up a Persian shawl, flung it over her head and shoulders, whisked her skirt over her arm, unhasped a French window opening on a balcony, passed out, went quickly down the stairs, and ran along the great shadowy avenue straight as an arrow and fleet as a fawn!

When Lady Silverdale reached the pretty lodge and knocked, she was quite out of breath.

A hobbling step. Granny Morris opened the door and peered out.

"Who is it?" she demanded.

"I!" the Countess replied, slipping past her and into the little parlour.

The old woman recognised her.

"I did not know your ladyship just at first. Is Jane without?"

"No. I came alone. I just ran down to see the child. Jane told me she brought him here this afternoon. I am very much interested in him. I knew his parents."

"Certainly, my lady!"

But she gave her a keen glance. She was a shrewd old woman, and she did not exactly comprehend this feverish, friendly solicitude for an orphan wail.

She took up a candle and led the way into an adjoining apartment.

The Countess followed her. Her shawl had slipped from her head. Her silken gown rustled as she moved. The lovely face was all aglow with exercise, excitement.

"There he is, your ladyship!"

On a cheap, but daintily immaculate bed, lay a sleeping baby. The clothes had been tossed off. Bare were the rosy limbs. The tiny, featured face on the pillow was flushed. Over the moist brow clustered sunny hair. The lashes lay dark and curling on the pink cheeks. The red lips were half parted.

Slowly the Countess advanced and stood beside the bed. She said no word. She did not even utter a sigh.

But the white-capped old dame regarding her saw the small jewelled hands grip each other in a fierce and straining grasp.

Never, in all her strong, young life, had emotion so mastered her.

Her child—her own child—and she dared not claim him! He must know no mother. She had a son, but she lived childless! Oh, Heaven, the thought was bitter—hard to bear!

Her heart beat furiously. She felt herself growing faint and chilly.

But she gave no outward sign of the fierce struggle which swayed her. Apparently impassive she stood there.

The child stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes. She gave a sudden start.

Ah, Garrett had spoken truly! No need to ask whose child was that. The dimple in the chin, the golden curls, the beautiful black eyes—what a miniature reproduction they were!

"Willie hungry?"

The sweet, hisping voice! He was not half as hungry as she was, she thought, with a pang.

She was frightened at the volcanic emotion the sight of the child had aroused. She had not supposed such passionate mother-love lay dormant in her heart. She dare not trust herself to stay longer.

"He is a pretty child. Take good care of him," she said, with an indolent smile.

But the kiss she pressed on the baby brow was very tender.

Thrusting a gold-piece in the old woman's wrinkled hand, she hurried out—home.

She had just gained her boudoir, flung off her wrap, when her husband entered.
 "Where have you been, Lillian? We've been searching everywhere for you. Our guest has arrived. Sir Geoffrey Darnay is in the drawing-room."

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2061. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.)

HINTS ON LETTER WRITING.

A desirable correspondent is one who not only dates her letters, but writes upon it the day of the week, so as to give an intelligent idea of what she means by "to-morrow."

One who discriminates in the matter of ink, not choosing that which is as pale as skim milk, nor the very black, nor the very purple, writing with it on extremely thin paper, so that when you hold the sheet to the light you cannot read it.

One who does not go into ecstasies about the weather, the height and depth of the thermometer, or the mental or physical condition of her own sweet self.

One who answers the questions asked by you in your last letter, concluding that unless you wanted to know, you would not have written them.

One who fastens the envelope securely, for she knows nothing is so annoying as to receive a half-opened letter.

One who does not gush to a stranger, thinks it is worth while being patient to her friends, and who never lets business letters wait.

One who writes Mr. before a man's name in preference to "Esquire" after it.

One who spells your name correctly. You would suppose that your friends would know this, but very often they do not trouble themselves about it.

One who uses quiet paper, a good pen, a clear ink, and sits down to the pleasant task determined to express herself clearly and intelligently, putting "the dotlet on the i," the crossing to the t, the curling tails to her y, so that they do not look like q, and says what is necessary and no more, saying it in the best way.

NOT AFRAID OF WOLVES.—"If our spend-thrift son persists in his extravagance, James," said a careworn wife and mother, "we shall not be able to keep the wolf from our door." "It ain't wolves that I'm afraid of in this latitude," replied her dejected husband; "it is the brokers that I expect to see coming every day."

THINGS BETTER LEFT UNSAID.—Under the caption, *The Art of Putting Things*, an English author has given some very amusing examples of saying things in a queer way. One of the most unfortunate recorded attempts to escape from a conversational difficulty was made by an East-end curate, who cultivated the friendship of mechanics. One day a carpenter came to him and said:—"I have brought my boy's likeness, as you said you'd like to have it." "How good of you to remember!" said the curate. "What a capital likeness! How is he?" "Why, sir, don't you remember?" said the carpenter. "He's dead." "Oh, yes, of course, I know that," replied the curate. "I mean how's the man that took the photograph?" A story is told of a young labourer who, on his way to his day's work, called at the registrar's office to register his father's death. When the official asked the date of the event, the son replied:—"He ain't dead yet, but he'll be dead before night, so I thought it would save me another journey if you would put it down now." "Oh, but that won't do at all," said the registrar. "Perhaps your father will live till to-morrow." "Well, I don't know, sir; the doctor says as he won't; and he knows what he has given him."

Gems

Our lives should be like sun-dials—using all shadows to point to some hour that has a significance and a use.

The universal mark of manhood is manliness. Possession and position are the mere accidents of local conditions.

He that is selfish and cuts his own soul from the universal soul of all rational beings is a kind of voluntary outlaw.

A soul occupied with great ideas best performs small duties. The divinest views of life penetrate most clearly into the meanest emergencies.

The true art of being agreeable is to appear well pleased with all the company, and rather to seem well entertained with them than to bring entertainment to them.

Don't be in a hurry about finding your work in the world, but just look about you in the place you find yourself in, and try to make things a little better and homester there.

We may force the brain to do our bidding, but it is not so with the heart. Its demands are unchangeable and impatient; and it is but little wonder if, in the desperation of its unheeded dangers, it often wanders down to polluted streams and away off into strange pastures.

All vice stands upon a precipice. To engage in any sinful course is to run down the hill. If we once let loose the propensities of our nature we cannot gather in the reins and govern them as we please. It is much easier not to begin a bad course than to stop one when begun.

THE BABY'S FUTURE.

What shall we make of the baby.

His mother and I often plan,

A lawyer, doctor, or preacher,

Or a solid commercial man!

His mother thinks he's a genius,

One such as the world never saw;

She's very sure he'd be famous

If we brought him up to the law.

But, then, a doctor's profession

She thinks the noblest by far,

And as a physician the baby

Would brilliantly shine like a star.

And again at times there's about him

An air as of trying to reach

Beyond the world he was born in,

And we're sure he was made to preach!

But hark! he's yelling and bawling,

His voice rising higher and higher,

An auctioneer—that's what we'll make him,

He's such a magnificent crier!

CARE OF THE EYEBROWS.—The eyebrows must never be rubbed or brushed, except from the roots to the ends. Some people contract a bad habit in childhood of rubbing them the other way, and the effect is both grotesque and painful to behold. The hairs will never after lie as flat as they ought to do, and bristle in unexpected places. A tiny comb and brush should be used daily on them to keep them soft and smooth. They should be carefully washed every day, and the same care must be taken about the direction they are rubbed in. They should have vaseline gently smoothed over them once or twice a week. This will keep them in perfect health, and serve to strengthen and thicken them. Where they are scanty and coming out very much there is nothing better to use than a few drops of castor oil in a little paraffin. They are apt sometimes to be a little scurfy. When this is the case, vaseline must be put on the spot, and it must be bathed with hot water and a little soap till it is cured. On no account must it be rubbed.

Living Skeletons

An Illustration from Life

We are all familiar with the living skeleton or professional lean man of the side show, whose leanness is due partly to bad nutrition, and partly to the fact that by means of purgatives he expels the food from his system before it has time to be fully absorbed. In his case the emaciation is intentional, but there are scores of cases where it is quite the reverse, and brought about entirely by imperfect digestion and general ill-health. In such cases Charles Forde's Bile Beans will be found a sure and speedy remedy, as the following plain statement of fact goes to prove. The story comes from Mr. George Blanchard, of Morley Street, Kettering, and was told by him to a "Kettering Guardian" reporter. He said:—

"For seventeen years I suffered from acute indigestion, which steadily became worse till at last my doctor gave me up as incurable, and I came to be looked upon as dying. I had violent pains in my sides and stomach, which latter was always distended with wind; and though I belched incessantly I found no relief, for the simple reason that the wind kept forming as fast as I could get rid of it. Every morsel of solid food I swallowed seemed to turn to wind, and also brought on severe fits of vomiting, which shook my whole system. I had to leave off taking solid food altogether, and subsist entirely on liquids. As a consequence I became so weak that I could hardly drag one foot after the other, while my limbs wasted away till they were no thicker than those of an infant! To add to my misery, I suffered also from dizziness and profuse sweats. As I have said, I had medical advice, but derived no benefit, and after a time was told by my doctor that he could do nothing more for me, and that I should never again be well. At this I abandoned hope and made up my mind for death.

"I was in a pitiable condition when my wife chanced to read of the marvellous cures effected by Charles Forde's Bile Beans, and we got a box. I began taking them, and soon realised that I had at last found the right thing. The stomach pains ceased gradually, as did also the vomiting. The flatulence and dizziness disappeared, and I began to regain strength. All this time I had been taking Bile Beans regularly, and continued to do so, till now I am well and strong again, and feel better than I have done for twenty years. I can strongly recommend Charles Forde's Bile Beans to anyone suffering as I did from indigestion, dizziness, stomach pains, vomiting, or weakness." Charles Forde's Bile Beans are a certain cure for indigestion, biliousness, liver and kidney disorders, pains in the side, loins and back, constipation, piles, dizziness, sleeplessness, nervous and general debility, anemia, and all female ailments. Also for colds, chill, neuralgia, lumbago, rheumatism, and as a preventative of influenza. Bile Beans may be had of all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Mfg. Co., 119, London Wall, London, E.C., on receipt of price, one and three halfpence or two and nine. Their effect is truly wonderful.

ALL ALIKE

A brook that babbled through mossy ways
 Sang many, many a pretty air,
 And glad people listened and gave it praise,
 But it found its way, after many days,
 To the big blue sea and was swallowed there.

A boy, who was wonderful in his way,
 Caused simple country folk to stare;
 But of course he wasn't content to stay
 Where rustics praised, so he went away
 To the city and never was noticed there.

A calf once frolicked where fields were green,
 And hoisted its heels in the air;
 But the gate stood open one day—between
 The posts it hurried; it quit the scene
 And was lost at the stockyards, hide and hair.

ROSALIND'S VOW

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At this juncture the door was pushed open, and there stood on the threshold a tall, female figure, dressed from head to foot in sombre black.

It was Diana Blackmore, the housekeeper from the Lodge at Chiswick; and as her eyes fell on Vansittart's inert form there appeared on her lips the shadow of a contemptuous smile. But she did not waste her attention on him.

Turning to the Baronet, she said swiftly:

"Is your wife's name Rosalind Hawtreys?"

Too surprised to speak, Sir Kenneth made a gesture of assent, and the woman went on, still in the same low, eager tone—

"Do you know where she is?"

"I do not," answered the Baronet. "If you can tell me, you will lay me under an obligation."

"Then you want to find her?"

"Assuredly!"

"In spite of what Pierce Vansittart has just said?"

"How do you know what he has said?" demanded Sir Kenneth.

"Because I was at the door, and have overheard the greater part of your conversation," she returned equably. "Did I listen on purpose? you would ask. Yes, I did. I wanted information, and I got it, though not exactly in the way I supposed I should."

"What do you know of my wife?"

"Not much, it is true; but I know where she is at the present moment—The Lodge, Chiswick."

Sir Kenneth turned paler, if possible, than before. He knew the house, having been there in the lifetime of Vansittart's father, and, if Vansittart had spoken truth in this particular—then perhaps—

But his thought got no further, for the woman seemed to have divined it in some mystical manner, and said, quickly,—

"I should add, she is there against her will, I can prove that. In effect, she is a prisoner."

"A prisoner!"

"Yes, and her jailor is the man lying there. Stay; I have no doubt I can put the key of her prison in your hand."

And as she spoke Diana advanced towards the prostrate figure of the still senseless man, and took from the inner breast-pocket a leather memorandum case, from which she produced a bunch of keys.

One of these she placed in the hands of the surprised Baronet.

"All you have to do now is to go to Chiswick and release the lady."

Sir Kenneth felt like a man in a dream, and for a minute or two could only stare at his companion in a half-stupefied manner that was, under the circumstances, quite excusable.

For it must be remembered that until this evening he had had no idea that Vansittart was even acquainted with his wife; and, although he had come to London for the express purpose of finding Rosalind, it was little less than marvellous that he should succeed in discovering her whereabouts on the very evening of his arrival.

It is not surprising, therefore, that he accepted Diana's communication with some doubt.

"How can I tell you are speaking the truth?" he asked, but holding the keys firmly as he spoke.

She laughed in her usual sardonic manner.

"You cannot tell; but you may take it for granted, especially as I am ready to lead you to the place of your wife's incarceration. I have nothing to gain by telling a lie, and you have nothing to lose by coming with me and testing the veracity of my statement."

"That is true."

"Then, shall I take you to The Lodge?"

"Yes, I will follow you."

She turned round at once, but, half-way to the door, seemed struck by a fresh idea, and went back to the lamp, by whose light she glanced over the contents of the pocket-book, her face darkening ominously the while.

Amongst other notes and memoranda was a letter directed to herself, and placed in an envelope, which she at once tore open. It ran as follows:—

DEAR DIANA,—By the time you read this I shall be out of England, and, as the date of my return is extremely uncertain, I think it better to make arrangements for a long absence.

"Accordingly, I wish to shut up The Lodge, which I shall sell at the first available opportunity; therefore, you will kindly look out for a fresh home; and, as a token of my goodwill at parting, I enclose you a cheque for twenty-five pounds, which you will accept as a little souvenir."

"You will have found out by this time that the illness of your sister was a little ruse I practised on you for the purpose of getting you out of the way, but I am sure, under the circumstances, you will forgive it."

"Your presence would have been awkward at this moment, as I doubt whether your feelings to the lady who has been staying at The Lodge are altogether friendly."

"That lady, I may mention, will be on her way to America with me when you get this. You will, I am sure, recognise the wisdom of my proceedings, and also my desire to spare your feelings as much as possible."

"It is unlikely that we shall ever meet again, but you will always believe that I take a sincere interest in you, and have every good wish for your future prosperity."

"PIERCE VANSITTART."

The woman's black brows met over her angry eyes, and her teeth ground themselves together.

"To think," she cried aloud, with a furious gesture of abhorrence, "to think I have loved, lived for, sinned for this man!"

And she spurned with her foot the prostrate form, over which Sir Kenneth was now bending, for Vansittart lay so motionless that the Baronet had been seized with a panic as to whether he was indeed alive.

His fears were groundless. Vansittart's heart still beat, and even as Sir Kenneth placed his hand upon it the wretched man moved slightly, and a low moan issued from his lips.

"You need not be afraid," Diana said, scornfully, observing the action, and interpreting it aright. "He is reserved for a more ignominious fate than death at the hands of a gentleman. Come, we waste time; and, remember, that your wife is a prisoner, and, therefore, each moment is lengthened tenfold for her."

She led the way downstairs, and he followed, still with a feeling of unreality, as if these events were all part of a dream.

Although it was now one o'clock, there were yet plenty of people about, as well as hansom cabs; and Diana hailed one of the latter, got into it, and told Sir Kenneth what address to give the driver.

Sir Kenneth took his seat by her side, and would have questioned her, but she made a peremptory gesture of silence; and, leaning forward, so as to get the full light of the lamp, began to read through the whole of the papers contained in Vansittart's pocket-book, which she had brought with her. Evidently these documents displeased her, for her face grew darker and darker as she perused them.

And now, for the benefit of our readers, it may be well to mention the series of incidents

that had culminated in her appearance before Sir Kenneth at so opportune a moment.

As is already known, she was by no means pleased at Rosalind's presence at The Lodge, and was more than inclined to regard Vansittart's story of the mistake as a subterfuge on his part.

He had peremptorily forbidden her to hold any sort of communication with his prisoner, with the result that Diana's curiosity was considerably increased by the mandate, which it is probable she would at once have disobeyed but for the important fact of Rosalind's rooms being locked, and Vansittart himself having the key.

The girl's meals were sent up and down by means of a dumb waiter, which, by some complicated mechanism, came up through the floors, and communicated with the kitchen below, and the windows were barred so securely that entrance through them, even by means of a ladder, was quite out of the question.

The outer doors, too, were very thick, and so Diana had no means of communicating with Rosalind, and finding out who she really was.

Nevertheless, that she was not a willing captive she already knew from her efforts to escape; and, in spite of Vansittart's assertion to the contrary, she suspected that he had a sinister motive in running such a risk.

When Vansittart had completed his arrangements with Gaston he was quite cognizant of the fact that, in order to carry them to a successful issue, it would be necessary to get rid of Diana, who would assuredly interfere with them if she could.

He had, therefore, had a false telegram despatched from York, where the housekeeper's only sister lived, and it urged Diana's immediate presence at this sister's dying bed.

The housekeeper at once got ready, but, oddly enough, just as she was about starting, there came by post a letter from her sister, dated the day before, and apparently written in the best of health and spirits, saying that she proposed coming to London the next week, and asking Diana to meet her at the station.

At first Diana was puzzled, then a light broke upon her, but she determined to make assurance doubly sure.

Accordingly, she left the Lodge, accompanied by Vansittart, who had come over early in the morning, and took a ticket for York. Vansittart stayed with her until the train started, and an indescribable something in his expression, as he bade her good-bye, warned her that her departure was a relief to him.

"I will prove myself your match yet!" she muttered, as she leaned back in her corner, and watched him from behind the curtain; and at the very next station she alighted, and sent off a telegram to her sister, with the answer prepaid.

She had not more than half an hour to wait before the reply was put in her hand, and, as she expected, it contained a denial of being ill or of having sent a previous wire.

Diana smiled grimly as she read it, and at once took a ticket back to King's Cross; but she had some little time to wait before her train came in, and it was late in the evening when she finally reached the Lodge.

Arrived there she let herself in with her latch-key, and found the house apparently deserted. Her first action was to go up to the door of the room where Rosalind had been confined, and push a tiny rolled-up piece of paper through the keyhole. On this paper she had written a few words:

"Are you still there, and if so, what is your name? Write on the back of this.—A Friend."

The answer came back promptly enough. "I am still here, and at the mercy of a man who knows not the meaning of honour or pity. If you are, indeed, a friend, have compassion on me, and release me. My name is Rosalind Hawtreys."

A few more slips of paper were pushed backwards and forwards through the keyhole,

and it ended in Diana declaring her intention of doing her best to obtain the girl's release, and starting off for Vansittart's chambers, with the consequences we have seen.

The memoranda in the pocket-book, and the letter she had read, addressed to herself—but which Vansittart had not intended she should have until he was well out of England—further enlightened her, and left no doubt that the man's intentions were to get rid of her, once and for ever, and by the gift of twenty-five pounds rid himself of all his obligations towards her.

Sir Kenneth felt his heart beating rather quicker than usual as they drove through the dark, deserted roads, and gradually neared their destination. As to whether this woman had really spoken the truth, or whether she was laying a trap into which he had walked with his eyes open, he could hardly tell—time alone would show. If she was, indeed, conducting him to his wife, then he and Rosalind would meet under circumstances almost as strange as those under which they parted.

The Baronet's eyes grew stern as he thought of that farewell. No matter whether Maraquita had been badly treated or not, her sister had taken such means of avenging her as he could never forgive!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

And how, during all this time, was Rosalind herself faring?

The solitude of her prison did not affect her half so much as the fear of its being invaded by Vansittart, and she had ample food for reflection in the disclosures he had made to her, which had wrought so complete a revolution in her ideas.

But, for all that, it was very terrible to be there hour after hour, with no break in the monotony save when the dumb waiter made its appearance with her luncheon or dinner on it, and went down almost as it came up, for poor Rosalind's anxiety left her little appetite.

What the end of it all would be she could not tell, or to what lengths Vansittart's lawless passions would carry him, and the suspense was almost as dreadful as certainty would have been.

More than once she mentally cried out for her husband to come and rescue her; but, alas! what claim had she upon him—him whom she had deceived and deserted?

Most of her time was passed pacing backwards and forwards, for inaction was unbearable in her present frame of mind, and a fear that constantly tortured her was lest her mind should give way under this perpetual strain.

To make any further attempts to escape would be, as she knew, useless. The outer doors were too thick to allow of being cut through, as the door of communication between the two rooms had been; and, besides, her poor little penknife was broken, so she had no weapon to work with. All she could do was to wait with what patience she might, and see what turn events would take.

That she would be rescued seemed too slender a hope to rely upon. Her friends were so few—Cland, Nona, Edith, and the Selwins—and as none of them were likely to know of her captivity, so none of them would be likely to make efforts for her release.

No; her own ingenuity and woman's wit was all she had to trust to, and sometimes they seemed to her the rottenest of rotten reeds.

She had ample time to think over her past life, and reflect on the terrible mistake she had made. Her whole existence had been dedicated to the task of vengeance, and lo! it had recoiled on her own head.

Of her joy, when that tiny wisp of paper came fluttering through the keyhole, we will not speak.

Who her mysterious "friend" might be she could not tell; but she could lose nothing by telling her under what circumstances she

was brought to The Lodge, and there was no reason why she should conceal her name.

After Diana had gone, the young girl tried to buoy herself up with the hope that at last rescue was close at hand; but sometimes she grew desponding, and told herself the hope was fallacious, and she must prepare for the worst.

And so the hours passed by, sadly, drearily, each one dragging out its weary length more slowly than the other.

She had lighted the lamp but had not drawn the blinds, and she alternated between the two windows at the ends of the room, peering into the dusk, but able to discern nothing from the one but trees, and nothing from the other save the river.

A dead silence reigned in the house—not a door banged, not a footstep creaked on the stairs.

The clock struck eleven, twelve, one; and yet the gruesome stillness remained unbroken.

Rosalind's nerves became strained to such a tension that she could have screamed aloud, if only for the sake of disturbing the weird spell of quietude by the sound of her own voice.

At last it seemed to her she heard a faint noise that might have been the shutting of the front door, and a few minutes later there came the sound of a key being fitted in the lock of the door.

Her heart stood still. Was it Vansittart come back, or—? Before she could formulate her hope the door was flung wide open, and on the threshold stood the last person in the world she expected to see—her husband!

He advanced a step forward, and she, with a half hysterical cry, flung herself at his feet.

"Kenneth! Kenneth! you have come back to me; you have forgiven me!" she cried, wildly, incoherently, clinging round his knees, while her beautiful hair, broken loose from its fastenings, swept the floor like a veil. "Oh! my husband, my husband, say you have forgiven me—say you will take me back, and blot out the past!"

His lips quivered, but his stern face grew sterner. He bent down and unclasped her clinging arms—or, rather, would have done so, had she not vehemently repulsed him.

"No, no; I will stay here until you have pardoned me. This is my place, and I will keep it. See how humble I am; see how my proud spirit is broken! You have conquered, Kenneth, and here, on my knees at your feet, I express my contrition. Will you not forgive me?"

"Control yourself, Rosalind," he said, coldly. "Remember we are not alone."

"I care not if all the world sees me!" she cried, wildly. "I deserve my punishment—but not that it should be eternal. Kenneth, have you not one word to say to me—not one word?"

Her voice broke into a wailing cry, and she raised her lovely, tear-wet eyes to his. Sir Kenneth was no stoic, and he had to turn away lest his resolution should be melted by the exquisite beauty and pathos of that imploring face.

He glanced round. Diana, who had followed him up, had now withdrawn, and with a certain instinctive delicacy left husband and wife alone.

It is needless to say that Sir Kenneth was wholly unprepared for such a scene as this. He was quite unaware of the events that had taken place since his parting with his wife, and the changes that had wrought in her feelings; and although, for the sake of duty and the name she bore, he had felt it incumbent upon him to protect her, his own mental attitude had not changed in the least degree.

"Rise, Rosalind," he said, retreating a step, and shaking himself free from her clasp. "This is no time for such protestations. Let us leave this house without delay. Surely you have been here long enough!"

She obeyed him, inasmuch as she rose to her feet and stood opposite to him, her face

worn and haggard, but still most lovely, in the light of the lamp. Her bare, white arms, from which the drapery had fallen back, were outstretched, and her attitude was none the less supplicating than when she grovelled at his feet in her agony of humiliation.

"What good will escape do me if I fail to win your love?" she exclaimed.

Sir Kenneth raised his brows, and smiled, bitterly.

"My love!" he repeated. "It is not so long ago since you spurned it as scornfully as you would spurn some noisome worm."

"I was mad then—I am sane now."

"Indeed! I had almost thought it was the other way about."

"Do not be hard on me, Kenneth! I have suffered enough already."

Something in her words seemed to sting him, for he turned on her fiercely.

"And do not you think that I have suffered as well? Do you think you taunts fell on deaf ears? Do you think I am a stone or a block of wood not to be touched by the bitterest contumely—the most heartless cruelty—the most deliberate deception?"

Lower and lower drooped her head. She dared not raise her eyes.

"All that you say is true. I do not deny it."

"And yet you ask me to forget it?"

"Yes; for the sake of the love I bear you."

Again he laughed contemptuously.

"You must pardon me for being sceptical as to the existence of such love. If you had loved me, you would not have treated me as you have done."

"But that is over and past. Recollect, too, that if to sin is human, so to forgive is divine. I know how horribly I have behaved to you; I know that not one man in a thousand would forgive me. But you are not as other men; you are nobler, better, more generous; prove it by this supreme act of pardon! No Magdalen ever repented as I do; if I could only make you understand my misery and my contrition; if you could only see into my heart, I know I should not plead in vain."

As she ceased speaking he looked at her for a moment in silence; then he shook his head.

"I confess I cannot understand this change of demeanour on your part. How is it that a few months ago you sent me from you declaring that, of all men, I was the most hateful to you, and now you wish me back?"

"Because since our wedding-day I have learnt the truth, and I know that you are innocent of my sister's death."

"Ah! Who told you this?"

"Pierce Vansittart. He confessed his treachery towards you and her; nay, I use a wrong expression—he boasted of it. If I had only known it earlier, what misery we both might have spared!"

"You are right, but there is something more to be said. Even if your idea of me had been a true one; if I had, as you said, won Maraquita's love and thrown it aside, you would not have been justified in what you did. I was not answerable to you for my sins. No, nothing can excuse you; and as for your pretended love," he turned away with a gesture full of scorn, "you must forgive me if I decline to believe in its existence."

Amplly had he avenged himself for the slights she had heaped upon him! But Rosalind recognised a sense of justice in his words—if she had not done so she would hardly have had courage to continue her entreaties.

"I loved Maraquita so dearly," she cried, in eager self-justification. "She was all the world to me, and think what it was to lose her! Think, too, of my lonely childhood, and the influence such a tragedy would have on my mind!"

"I have thought of it all," he returned, with stony inflexibility, "and it does not alter my opinion."

"I was so young!"

"And that renders your crime all the more unnatural. If you had acted on the impulse of the moment, if you had been carried away by a sudden gust of passion, I might admit an excuse. But it was not so. You laid your plans with a quiet determination; you worked patiently and persistently until your ends were obtained; and then you triumphed over your victory and your victim. Are not your words stamped in letters of fire on my brain? Can I ever forget the agony of my wedding-day, and the miserable months that followed it? And not only that, you destroyed my faith in all that was good and beautiful in womanhood. You were my idol, and I saw you thrown down from your pedestal, earth-stained and debased! No, Rosalind, your repentance comes too late—my love is dead!"

"No! no!" she shrieked, throwing up her arms with a movement of utter despair. "Do not say that—anything but that! Tell me I must wait—I must prove my penitence! Set me some task, banish me from you for a time—a year, two, ten years—only say that at last you will give me your pardon and your love!"

There was something almost terrible in her vehemence. She pleaded as some condemned wretch pleads for life. And, indeed, it was more than life that was slipping from her grasp.

Never until this moment had she actually realised how much she loved him. He looked so noble, so strong, so handsome, even in his unbending sternness; and to think that in her mad folly she had trampled on the precious gift of his love!

It was difficult to recognise beautiful, cold, imperious Rosalind in this passionate creature, carried out of herself by love, forgetting her old pride, conscious only that her last chance was vanishing, and then seized with a cold numbness of despair, as she saw how utterly unmoved Sir Kenneth seemed.

It was all of no avail! An idol carved in stone could not be more inflexible—outwardly. Inwardly a battle was raging in his breast; for in spite of his assumed stoicism he was touched to the heart by his wife's agony; but that stern justice on which he prided himself would not let him betray this weakness. Her misery was wrought by her own hand, and she must bear the consequences! He had borne them during all these long months since they had parted, and would go on bearing them to his life's end.

It was but just that her punishment should equal his.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Edith Charlton often used to wonder whether she was indeed the same girl who had run races with Monk under the sun-flecked shadows of the elms a few short months ago. Life was altogether changed now, and she went listlessly about the house, too languid to play, too restless to read—a very shadow of her former self.

"How is it I never hear you laugh now?" the old Squire said to her. "You used to be always skipping and singing about the place, and now you do nothing but moan."

"And do that badly!" she returned, with a desperate effort at cheerfulness. "I know I'm a fraud, daddy dear, but I can't help it. Perhaps when the spring weather comes I shall pick up, and be myself again."

The Squire looked dubious. Privately he thought there was little chance of her looking herself again, while Claud languished in prison—for the old man suspected his daughter's secret now, and it made clear many things that had formerly puzzled him.

On the day after Mr. Causton's visit Edith was sitting alone in the morning-room, some fancy work on her lap—in which, however, she had not as yet put so much as a stitch! Monk was lying at her feet, his nose on his paws, watching with supreme scorn the playful evolution of a little black kitten, that had pos-

sessed itself of Edith's thimble, and was now rolling it about on the floor.

It was a lovely day for the time of year, the sky blue, the air soft, and pale gleams of wintry sunshine coming in through the window, and falling on Edith's face, and pretty rippling hair.

"Oh dear!" she sighed, putting out her hand to stroke the dog's massive tawny head, "what a complicated business life is, Monk! For my part, I think it would simplify matters very much if I were to go straight away into a convent, and rid myself of the cares of the world at one bold stroke. What do you say, dear doggie?"

Monk beat the floor with his tail, and looked up into her face with his large, intelligent eyes full of sympathy. The girl bent down and kissed him.

"You could say so much if you could only speak," she said. "Ah, if men and women were only as true and honest as you! What a different place the world would be."

Again Monk wagged his tail, thereby assenting to this business, and just then a servant came in to say that a visitor wished to see his young mistress.

Edith looked up with languid interest.

"A visitor! Who is it?"

"She would not give her name, miss; but—" lowering his voice, mysteriously, "I think it is the blind lady who was here the other day, and who has something to do with Mr. Stuart."

Edith rose to her feet, and began to tremble.

"I will not see her—I cannot! Tell her so," she exclaimed, sharply.

The servant withdrew, was absent a few minutes, and then returned—disobeying his mistress's orders for the sake of the half-sovereign pressed in his palm by the persistent visitor.

"If you please, miss, the lady says she won't detain you long, and her business is most important."

"It does not matter, I do not care!" Edith cried, excitedly. "Tell her again I refuse to see her—"

What more she would have added it is hard to say, for even as she spoke the door was pushed gently open and a silvery voice said—

"Ah, Miss Charlton, do not deny me an interview! The matter on which I would speak to you is one that nearly concerns yourself. Pray—you hear me!"

Nona Vansittart had followed the servant in, guided by the sound of his voice, and now she pushed past him, and stood a little way from the door, feeling her way before her with outstretched hands and the unconscious appeal of the blind in her attitude.

Edith hesitated, and Nona divined this, and added, quickly—

"Let my affliction plead for me—it is the one claim I have upon you."

The footman discreetly withdrew, closing the door after him as he went, and Edith found herself forced either to accede to the request of her unwelcome visitor, or to lead her to the door. Naturally, she chose the former alternative.

"I do not know what you can have to say to me," she observed, stiffly.

"I will tell you in as few words as I can. I have seen Claud this morning—"

"Hush!" cried Edith, imperatively. "I wish to hear nothing concerning Mr. Trevelyan—at least, from your lips."

Nona paused over the taunt in silence.

"And yet," she said, reproachfully, "you once called yourself his friend!"

"So I was—once," Edith returned, her voice faltering a little; "and so I should be still if I thought him worthy of my friendship."

"He is worthy of it," vehemently. "He is one of the best and noblest men in the wide world. I have cause to say it."

"And you ought to be the last person to believe," Edith rejoined, pointedly.

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"Ah, I hear the note of suspicion in your voice, but you wrong him—indeed, indeed you do! It is for the purpose of proving this that I am here now."

"Your journey is a lost one, then!" cried Edith, angrily determined. "I have no wish to discuss Mr. Trevelyan with you—no wish to speak of him—think of him, even."

"Not even when you know that the bitterest part of his present trial is the knowledge of your aversion?"

Edith looked a little startled. This was the last thing she expected to hear.

"It is the truth," went on Nona, coming a step nearer, and groping about so as to avoid a possible collision with the furniture.

Edith observed the action, and involuntarily sprang forward and laid her hand on the blind woman's arm, so as to guide her. In a moment Nona had seized hold of the slim white fingers, and held them firmly in her own.

"Now listen to me," she said, impressively, "and, believe me, you will be more than glad after you have heard what I wish to say. When I saw you last it needed not sight to tell me that you mistrusted me; and, casting about in my mind for the reason of this, I came to the conclusion that it must have something to do with Claud, for all you know of me must necessarily have come through him. Well, I formed a theory—I need not tell you what it was—and when I went to see Claud this morning I questioned him on the subject. At first he tried to evade me, parried my questions, and endeavoured to lead me off to some other topic, but I was persistent, and would not be repulsed. Finally I got him to confess that he loved you, and had once been engaged to you, and that the reason of your parting was—myself."

Edith uttered a faint little cry, and tried to wrench her hand away, but her companion would not let it go.

She resumed.

"I had half suspected this, and I forced Claud to tell me the whole story. He has enough to bear, poor fellow, in this awful accusation that is brought against him, without the added misery of misinterpretation on the part of the woman he loves!"

"Loves!" exclaimed Edith, incredulously.

"Yes—loves! I repeat it!"

"Then why did he not explain his conduct?"

"Because a chivalrous sense of honour forbade it!"

"That is to say," satirically, "he kept silence out of consideration for you, and because he did not wish to confess his own dishonour!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Nona, sternly. "You know not how terribly you misjudge him! I will not pretend that I do not understand what is in your mind, but Claud was my dearest friend—my more than brother! He was never my lover!"

"You deserted your husband's home for him!"

"Yes; because my husband's home was unsafe for me to remain in; because I feared the man whose name I bore, and I will tell you why."

We need not go over her story, which is already known to the reader.

She kept nothing back. Told how by accident Claud had shot her when defending her from her husband; and how, from that time, he had constituted himself her defender and friend.

Then she went on to tell of her little nephew, and the tragedy that resulted in his death; and at this point she broke down, and burst into a storm of passionate, regretful sobs, which Edith had some difficulty in soothing. Then came the recital of how Claud took the Cedars, and she, in order to evade pursuit on the part of her husband, disguised herself as his mother.

She narrated her history simply and graphically, and as she concluded, said—

"Part of this I have already told to your father, but I made him promise to keep it secret. You may imagine how bitter it is for me to reopen old wounds thus, but it was my duty to let you know Claud's real character, and the sacrifices he has made on my behalf. Now do you forgive him?"

Great tears were rolling down the young girl's cheeks. She felt the tale was true, and she saw that her lover had only been faithful to his word when he refused to enlighten her after Fulke Marchant had given his version of the tie that bound the supposed mother and son together. How she had misjudged him! and how cruel Fate had been to both of them!

Nona softly passed her arm round her companion's shoulder, and touched her wet cheek.

"You will let him know that you have forgiven him!" she whispered.

"Forgive him!" cried Edith. "What is there for me to forgive? Rather say, let me ask his forgiveness. But," she added, despondingly, "perhaps he no longer cares for me!"

"My dear," Nona said, simply, "love is not for a day, but for ever!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Mr. Causton felt that, in warning Sir Kenneth, he had acted less with the caution of a detective than the honour of a gentleman; but still he thought so much was due to the Baronet, and he was glad he had paid it. After that he was at liberty to make his own plans, and set about the task of tracking Rosalind in the way he liked best.

The more he thought over the murder the more convinced did he feel that she could throw light upon it. Of course, his professional career had taught him that strange coincidences do exist still; he was inclined to look upon her disappearance from the White House, on the very night the murder was committed, as something more than a coincidence. She knew the errand Claud was going on, and what might she not have

discovered by simply using her wits, when the only check upon her was a blind woman?

"All women are avaricious, and all women are crafty," Mr. Causton said to himself. Then the remembrance of Janet flashed across his mind, and caused him to modify his opinion. "At any rate, a good many women are—not all, perhaps. Here we have a lady separated from her husband, apparently poor, and said to be beautiful. Who knows what her friends were? It is more than probable she was in collusion with some man, and that man committed the murder."

Thus he reflected, as he lay back in his corner of the railway carriage, furtively watching the dark, handsome features of the Baronet, who was opposite him. And then he continued his meditations.

"It is possible Sir Kenneth knows where she is, and if so he will at once warn her. That is, of course, the object that made him leave Weir Cottage so suddenly. Even if she were an accomplice of the murderer, and her husband knew it, he would naturally do his best to shield her, for the sake of his name. I must keep him well in view for the next forty-eight hours, and at the end of that time I shall, no doubt, have something definite to go upon."

Then he relit his cigar, and his destination was reached without any further conversation passing between him and Sir Kenneth. Indeed, the latter read, or pretended to read his newspaper very assiduously, and hardly raised his eyes from it until the arrival at Paddington, where he alighted and called for a hansom.

Causton took up his rug and portmanteau, and stood as if in indecision until Sir Kenneth had entered his cab, and given orders to the driver to take him to the hotel in Piccadilly. Then, and not till then, the lawyer hailed a four-wheeler, and gave to the cabby exactly the same directions as the Baronet had given, after which he sprang in, and instantly began

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to occupy himself with the contents of the hand-bag he had brought with him.

From the bag he took a curious collection of articles—a hand-glass, a lamp, a grey wig and whiskers, a pair of spectacles, and the long coat, high waistcoat, and soft felt hat of a high church cleric.

A four-wheeled cab, even when it is the roomiest of its species, does not afford very ample accommodation—as a dressing-room, but the lack of space did not seem to inconvenience Causton in the very smallest degree. With a swiftness and dexterity that would have moved to admiration an onlooker—had one chanced to be present—he divested himself of a great part of his attire, and assumed the clerical coat and waistcoat; then began the transformation of his face, which the whiskers and spectacles effected very completely, even without the aid of the grey wig. He grinned complacently as he regarded himself in the hand-glass by the light of his small lamp.

"Pretty fair, considering the circumstances," he muttered, after which he bundled the clothes he had taken off into a bag, and hardly had he done this when the cab stopped in Piccadilly.

The driver stared hard as he saw the middle-aged parson emerge from the cab, in lieu of the young-looking man who had entered it; but Causton pressed a double fare into his hand, and he drove slowly off, his mouth screwed up, very suggestively, and his left eye winking violently.

Causton's object was to get rooms in the same hotel as Sir Kenneth, without attracting the latter's attention, and this he was enabled to do with perfect success—for the Baronet was by no means a suspicious man; and it never struck him that the benevolent old parson whom he met in the hall could possibly be one and the same as Richard Causton, solicitor, with whom he parted at Paddington; neither did he notice that, as he strolled out of the hotel, the clergyman always kept about the same distance after him.

Causton was brought to a standstill when Sir Kenneth entered the house into which Pierce Vansittart had just gone. He dared not venture upstairs for fear of detection, but he waited patiently enough near the entrance, and he saw Diana Blackmore drive up in a cab, get out, and disappear through the open doorway.

The housekeeper was deeply veiled, so that no glimpse of her features could be obtained; but her tall and commanding figure, and a certain nameless grace in her carriage, made Causton jump to the conclusion that she was none other than Lady Hawtreys herself!

It must be remembered that he had never seen Rosalind, but she had been described to him by Claud as tall and stately—the sort of person one would turn to look at if one met her in the street. Diana answered perfectly to this description, so the lawyer's mistake was by no means unnatural.

"The pursuit has not been difficult," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully. "In all probability she lives here, and Sir Kenneth has lost no time in warning her. I don't know that I can do much more to-night, but, at any rate, I'll wait half an hour longer, and see what happens."

What happened was that the Baronet presently came down with the lady, whom he followed into a cab. The address given to the driver was in too low a tone for Causton to hear; so as he determined not to let them out of his sight, he had no alternative but to follow the cab—for the second time that evening.

It was a dark night—no moon, no stars; and after leaving the more frequented and well-lighted thoroughfares, the task of keeping the first hansom in view was somewhat difficult, especially as the second horse was by no means a swift steed, and had a decided objection to going in an opposite direction to his stables

at that time of night—or, rather, to speak more correctly, morning.

Causton grew impatient. He had thrown himself heart and soul into the elucidation of the "Crowthorne mystery," and so far success seemed to have attended his efforts. It would be too aggravating if he lost sight of Sir Kenneth and Lady Hawtreys at this critical moment!

At last the driver pulled up, and as Causton thrust his head out of the window, said—

"Werry sorry, sir, but my oss has cast a shoe. He's dead lame, and I can't take him on any further."

The pseudo-clergyman felt very much inclined to swear, but his own observation verified the cabman's words; and so there was nothing to be done but get out, and walk the rest of the distance—and how far it might be he had not the remotest idea.

The hansom was still in sight, and, luckily for Causton's purpose, was not going at a very quick pace. He determined to follow on foot—for there was no other vehicle of any kind in sight, and no prospect of one appearing.

By dint of running the lawyer managed for some time to keep the cab in view; then the driver whipped up his horse, and the animal started off at a trot. Try as he would, Causton could not keep up, and very soon found himself hopelessly behind.

It says a good deal for his pluck that he did not at this juncture turn back, and go to the hotel again; but he was not lightly discouraged, and he kept on, thinking that, in all likelihood, the cab, when dismissed, would return along the same road.

His surmise proved correct. In about half-an-hour's time he saw a hansom being driven towards him, and at once stopped the driver, who was cross and sleepy, and not in a mood to be questioned.

But the hardest gate may be unlocked by means of a golden key, and Causton possessed that somewhat rare faculty of knowing when to be generous. As he saw the glint of gold the cabman unbent, and not only told his inquirer where he had deposited his fare, but offered to drive him there—an offer that the lawyer at once accepted.

"Don't drive actually to the gate," he said, as he got in; "stop about three dozen yards on this side of the house."

"What a frightfully dismal spot!" was his first thought, as he alighted, and looked round. "One might be robbed and murdered and thrown into the river, and no one be any the wiser."

He exercised considerable caution while going down the long path between the trees that led to the house itself, stepping with the lightness and silence of a velvet-shod cat. And it was fortunate for him that he did so, for as he came near the house, a twig cracked under his feet, and a voice close at hand said, in a low whisper—

"Is that you, sir?"

He did not answer—did not even stir. He knew that it was impossible to distinguish his figure in the dense shadow in which he stood, and the whereabouts of his interlocutor he could only guess by the sound of the voice. There was a pause, then a muttered curse from the bushes on the right, and after that the sound of footsteps, apparently leaving the spot.

"Curious," murmured Causton. "I don't quite understand it. I wonder if it has anything to do with my case?"

When he got out of the plantation he found the side of the house that faced it in total darkness, but on going round to the front he observed a light in one of the windows; but the blind was down, and there were heavy iron bars across the casement, so that nothing was visible.

He determined to carry his investigations further. Experience had taught him the wisdom of knowing the exact geography of a place, and so he walked slowly down the

path that led to the river, groping his way along more by instinct than by anything else—for there were so many trees in the garden that they excluded what little light there was.

The river was just visible in the obscurity—flowing on, dark and silently, towards the distant sea. But what was that at the bottom of the steps? A boat, surely, and in it a man smoking a pipe. His features it was impossible to distinguish, and but for the dull, red glow of the tobacco in the pipe he might have passed unnoticed.

Causton withdrew as silently as he had come. An idea had struck him. Was this boat in waiting to take Lady Hawtreys away, and so elude pursuit? It did not seem unlikely, considering the circumstances; and, viewing it in this light, the lawyer was more than ever convinced that his suspicions of her were not groundless.

He resolved to wait patiently until events developed themselves—till morning came if need be. Every moment made him more interested, and more determined to solve the mystery. He took up his position behind a shrub, close to the door so that no one could come in or go out without his observing them, and he had not waited long before he heard the distant sound of wheels. They paused, then drove away, and a few minutes later a man's hasty footsteps came down the pathway.

When he reached the gravel in front of the house the man stood still, and gave a long, low whistle, with the result that he was almost immediately joined by another man.

"So it's you at last," said the second comer, in a grumbling voice. "I've been waiting for you the last two hours or more. I thought you were never coming, and I'm almost perished with the cold."

"It's not my fault," returned Vansittart—for it was he. "I could not come before for the simple reason of physical inability. A man with whom I had a dispute followed me to my rooms, and then brutally assaulted me. I was insensible for some time, and it was with some difficulty that I got here at all. If I had not been determined to keep to our original plans, I should have stayed quietly at home, and let matters take their chance."

"Then you are still resolved to take the lady aboard?"

"More resolved than ever," exclaimed Vansittart, with a savage oath; and our readers will guess that his desire to humiliate Sir Kenneth was increased tenfold by the events of the evening.

"The mischief of it is, that I have either lost or been robbed of my pocket-book and keys," he added, "and so I can't get in the house."

"Ring the bell," suggested Causton, very naturally. "Mrs. Blackmore will open the door."

"She won't, for the very sufficient reason that she is not there. By this time she is in Yorkshire with her sister."

"Then you mean to say the lady is in the house alone?"

"Exactly—and more than that, she is locked in her room, so that if I were to ring till doomsday, she could not come down to open the door. The only thing is to get in through the conservatory. I don't suppose the shutters are up at the French window. At any rate, we will try there first."

Causton listened to this colloquy with increasing amazement. The speaker evidently was not aware of Sir Kenneth's presence in the house; and who was "the lady locked in her room?"

The mystery thickened with each moment, and every nerve in the lawyer's body was quivering with excitement. He was like a war-horse, panting for the fray, as he crept stealthily after the two men on their way to the side of the house where the conservatory was situated.

Vansittart's surmise was correct. The glass door was shutterless, and by dint of breaking

a pane of glass—a task which Gaston effected with so much adroitness as to suggest a previous experience in such matters—the key was readily taken out of the lock inside, and the door opened. Then the two men entered.

(To be concluded next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,051. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

MARY.—For pimples such as you describe, an external application is recommended, composed of one ounce of sweet almonds and one drachm of fluid potassa, shaken well together, then adding one ounce of rose-water and six ounces of pure water. Dab this lotion on the parts of the face affected night and morning.

MARAGUITA.—The Needles is a cluster of five pyramidal rocks in the Channel, lying off the western extremity of the Isle of Wight. They are composed of thick strata of chalk alternating with very thin strata of black flint. The waves are continually producing changes in their forms, and only three of the pyramids now stand prominently out of the water.

ROSALIND.—You ought to consider the moral phases of the subject, which you seem to have lost sight of. If you were to reflect calmly upon the matter, you could not fail to see that you are treating your lover very unfairly, to say the least. You ought to act in accordance with your parents' wishes and advice, and give him a decided answer, one way or the other, at once.

SYDNEY.—To make an inextinguishable match, take four parts of dry nitre, two of gunpowder, two of charcoal, and one of sulphur, and mix them; then ram the compound into paper cases nine inches in length, and of the thickness of a common quill. When this compound is set on fire, rain will not extinguish it; the burning end of the match must be cut off to stay the fire.

AMY.—All you can do is to behave yourself in a ladylike way, and let things take their course. It would be well for you not to stop for the young man again, when you get off from your duties first. He should seek you, and not you him. Perhaps if he should see that you will not put yourself out of the way to secure his company, he would put himself out of the way to secure yours.

MAVIS.—A good preparation for cleaning silks may be made as follows:—Quarter pound of soft soap, a teaspoonful of brandy, and a pint of gin; mix all well together and strain; spread the mixture on each side of the silk, without creasing it, then wash it in two or three waters, and iron on the wrong side. It will look as good as new, and will not injure the most delicate colours.

INTERESTED OLD MAID.—No occupation is more delightful for a lady of taste and refinement than that of a florist. This is a profession, to be sure, which requires some capital and some study, but in any undertaking where a good return is expected something must be risked, and a woman must follow the same business principles as a man. A man hires money at 4 per cent., and with his brains, his time, and his intelligence he perhaps makes twice as much, and the difference is his gain in trade. A woman in almost all cases wishes to work, but not to risk, but to make more than a bare living it is essential that she risks something. The profession of florist has been tried by women, and with success.

BLUE BELL.—It is possible to remove superfluous hair, permanently, by inserting a fine needle between each hair, and then passing an electric spark through the needle, but although the operation is described as giving very little pain, as being effective, it has not come extensively into use so far, being extremely expensive.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—You have no legal means of preventing your son's marriage, and, under the circumstances, I cannot advise you to do more than to point out to him the wisdom of waiting until he is at least twenty-one before assuming the responsibilities of a married man. If the young people choose to come to London, someone would be found, without much difficulty, to perform the ceremony.

SIR KENNETH.—Two kinds of gas-meters are used; the water, or wet meter, and the dry meter, the former measuring the gas by the revolution of a chambered wheel partly immersed in water, the latter by the alternate filling and emptying of two cavities formed by circular discs and flexible bands connecting them, somewhat like double bellows. The amount of flow in each case is indicated on dials.

DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT.—Mizpah is a Hebrew word, meaning literally watch-tower. The signification you will find in Genesis, chapter xxxi., verse 49, where it says that Laban and Jacob set up a heap of stones as a witness to a covenant between them, and Laban called it "Mizpah, for he said, the Lord watch between thee and me when we are absent one from another." The word Mizpah is often inscribed on engagement rings.

IRIS.—The souring of milk during thunderstorms has been explained by attributing it to the ozone or active oxygen which is produced in the air by electrical discharges. I have carefully observed the phenomena, and have concluded that the effect is more mechanical than chemical, and that it is the concussion produced by the shock rather than by any change in the atmosphere which leads to the souring of the milk.

TOO FAT.—Banting, the substance of whose system to reduce corpulency I have frequently published, found that for him sugar was the most productive of fat, five ounces of it increasing his weight one pound. Other experimenters have advocated suet, in the form of pudding, as a fattening food, and also arrowroot, sago, tapioca, and farina. Milk has also been recommended for the same purpose, and last, but not least, cod-liver oil. The habits of persons have something to do with their leanness. Irregular hours of rest or for meals, hasty eating, and excessive hurrying through business hours, all tend to keep a person thin and lean, to say nothing of nervous anxiety, worry, ill-humour, and fret. Pickles, vinegar, sour wines or fruit, and acid vegetables should, I am told, be avoided by all who are desirous of becoming stout.

CLAUDE.—1. To make ginger-beer, put into one gallon of boiling water one pound of lump sugar, one ounce of the best unbleached Jamaica ginger well bruised, three-quarters of an ounce of cream of tartar, and two lemons sliced. Stir the ingredients frequently in a covered vessel until lukewarm; then add two ounces of yeast, and keep it in a moderately warm place, so as to excite a brisk fermentation; the next day rack and strain through flannel. Let it work for a day or two, then strain it again and bottle, wiring down the corks. 2. To make ginger pop, take five and a-half gallons of water, three-quarters of a pound of ginger root bruised, half an ounce of tartaric acid, two and a quarter pounds of white sugar, the whites of three eggs beaten, one small teaspoonful of lemon oil, and one gill of yeast. Boil the ginger root for thirty minutes in one gallon of the water, strain off, and put the oil in while hot. Mix. Make over night. In the morning skim and bottle, keeping out sediment.

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FWS

JENNY.—If you have received an invitation to attend a wedding, and are unable to attend, you should send a regret with a present to the bride; and if she has weekly receptions at her home after she returns from her wedding tour you must call if you desire to be considered among her friends.

CROWN.—A very practical remedy for stuttering is the following: "Go into a room where you will be quiet and alone; get some book that will interest but not excite you, and sit down and read two hours aloud to yourself, keeping your teeth together. Do the same thing every two or three days, or once a week if very tiresome, always taking care to read slowly and distinctly, moving the lips but not the teeth. Then, when conversing with others, try to speak as you have read, and determine not to stutter. After the first trial, the next will be attended with less difficulty, and so on until you are cured."

A. HAYNES.—It has been ascertained by experiment that the metals are the best conductors of heat, and that of the metals silver is the best, copper the next, gold the third, and bismuth the worst. Next to the metals, though far behind them, crystals, glass, and stones are the best conductors; but these differ as much among themselves as the metals do. Substances which belong to the animal and vegetable kingdoms—such as furs, silk, woolen, cotton, etc.—are extremely imperfect conductors—a property which doubtless serves, not only to guide us in the choice of our clothing, but also in some degree to protect animals and vegetables from the injurious effects of sudden changes of temperature.

X. Y. Z.—A special marriage license costs about £30, and is only granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury on extraordinary occasions. The ordinary marriage license costs £2 2s. 6d. at Doctors' Commons; surrogates in the country charge a little more. You will have to apply to a surrogate in Manchester, and be prepared to name the church in which the ceremony is intended to be performed.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—The apricot is a small tree, but it grows rapidly and attains the height of twenty or thirty feet. Its leaves are heart-shaped, and its flowers, which are usually white, and appear before the leaves, blossom before any other fruit tree in the early spring. The fruit is described as intermediate between the peach and the plum. It has the outside of the former and the stone of the latter.

DORIS.—As a general rule, the hair should not be washed oftener than once in two or three weeks. The effect of shampooing must be carefully watched, and the condition of the hair be taken into consideration, in order to decide this point. Oily hair needs more frequent attention than dry hair. A good method in general is as follows:—Tincture of green soap is rubbed thoroughly into the scalp with the fingers, care being taken to avoid scratching with the nails. A little hot water is added to make a good lather. A few drops of ammonia may be used in the water, especially if the hair be oily, but more than this is apt to dry and crack the hair. After thoroughly washing the hair in this manner, rinse well with several waters until the last one is perfectly clear. Drying should be accomplished by rubbing with warm towels, followed by a good dry massage with the finger-tips, till the whole head is in a glow. By this procedure the requisites of beauty and health, cleanliness and vigorous circulation, have been fulfilled.

UNCLE TOBY.—In order to put your property beyond the reach of your son-in-law you will have to make a will; and in order to make such a will as would insure the carrying out of your wishes, you will have to consult a lawyer of much experience in that branch of his profession. As you say your health is precarious, you should attend to the matter at once. Go to some lawyer of good reputation, tell him just what you want, and leave him to devise the means of carrying out your desire in the matter.

EXPERIMENTER.—The peculiar effect produced upon some metals by heating to redness and then suddenly cooling them is known as tempering. By this means extreme hardness is obtained, especially in steel, which is so susceptible to this process that almost any degree of hardness or brittleness can be obtained. If, for instance, a piece of steel is made red hot and then plunged into cold water, it becomes hard and brittle when cold, and is actually, though slightly, increased in bulk. Reheat the metal and allow it to cool slowly, and it again becomes soft and malleable as before. If it is again reheated, but not to redness, and suddenly cooled, it is still further softened. If before reheating the surface has been polished, a beautiful shade of colour is produced by the heat, which is varied according to the temperature employed. For ordinary operations the metal is cooled by plunging it in cold water; but oil, mercury, and saline solution are used for special purposes. A series of experiments conducted by eminent authorities has proved that the following colours are produced at the temperature given:—Very pale yellowish, by 430deg. Fahrenheit; pale straw, 450deg.; yellow, 470deg.; brown, 490deg.; mottled brown, 510deg.; purple, 530deg.; bright blue, 550deg.; blue, 560deg.; dark blue, 600deg.

B. E. (Kilmarnock).—It is not proper to pick your teeth or put your hand in your mouth while eating.

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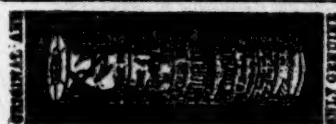
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